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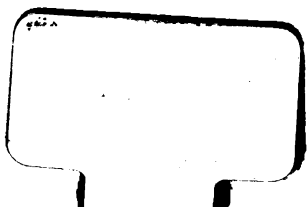
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PRACTICAL SERMONS.

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PRACTICAL SERMONS.

BY THE REV.

WILLIAM MARSHALL HARTE,

EXAMINING CHAPLAIN TO THE LORD BISHOP OF BARBADOS;

AUTHOR OF LECTURES ON THE GOSPEL OF ST. MATTHEW.

LONDON:

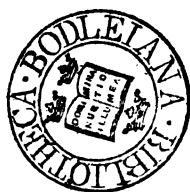
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WILLIAM HART COLERIDGE, D.D.
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SERMON I.

THE TRUE CHRISTIAN PROVES THAT HE HAS
BEEN WITH JESUS.

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“ . . . and they took knowledge of them, that they
had been with Jesus.”

THE history to which these words refer is as follows. A man; lame from his birth, had been suddenly healed by Peter and John, only in consequence of their naming on him the name of Christ. *In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.* This remarkable cure of a deeply seated and long existing malady seems to have excited a very strong feeling in the city where it was wrought, and to have roused the leading men among the Jews to a more determined opposition to the faith of Jesus,

and to the preaching of the Apostles. We can easily, my brethren, even at this distant period of time, and notwithstanding our exemption from the prejudices then prevailing. We can easily, I say, conceive the violence of spirit and the determined obstinacy, with which the chief priests and rulers of the Jewish nation would endeavour to counteract the effects of so notable a miracle. They first proceeded to imprison the two Apostles; but fearing lest by such violence they should shock too greatly public opinion, which was at that time on the side of the Apostles, they had recourse to milder measures. They summoned before them the two men, who had thus so powerfully stood forth, as the appointed workers of a miracle, that substantiated all the claims of their crucified Lord. They put the question—*by what power or by what name have ye done this?* Then Peter, filled with the *Holy Ghost*, answered with a measure of wisdom and boldness not his own—wisdom derived from above, and boldness infused into his heart by that mighty agent in man's sanctification, who is called

by an Apostle "the Spirit of power as well as of love, and of a sound mind." And it is remarkable, that Peter, the very man who in the palace of the high priest had quailed before a maid-servant, and forfeited all claim to courage and to boldness, when his deserted Master stood a prisoner in his presence, should thus suddenly and unexpectedly acquire a character so unlike the one which he had so lately manifested. What a proof is it to us, my brethren, and to all who will patiently examine the truth, that the true Christian acts from motives of which the world is altogether ignorant. The motives which influence the true believer cannot be duly appreciated by them who have only the love of the world within them. They have "*no part nor lot in this matter*,"—and are therefore unable to judge of him, who in whatsoever he does, does all in the name of the Lord Jesus. "*He that is spiritual*," says St. Paul, "*judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man*¹."

The defence made by St. Peter was thought too good for a man in his con-

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 15.

dition of life ; and his firmness in maintaining the ground which he took was considered most surprising, because he maintained it before men, to whom persons of his rank looked up with feelings of abject inferiority. *When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men,—that is, men not educated as the Scribes and Pharisees, and in a private station, holding no office either as teachers in the synagogues, or as rulers in their courts of justice, “they marvelled—and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.”*

Took knowledge. This means a recollection of a certain previous fact, forced on us by some event or some circumstance, bringing strongly the fact before our minds. Even these incredulous and obstinate infidels must have seen enough in our Lord's character and miracles, and heard enough in his discourses and teaching, to convince them, that notwithstanding their contempt of him he was no ordinary person, gifted with wisdom and knowledge far beyond what they could give account of. No won-

der, that the men who had so long associated with him, and were now the appointed preachers of his doctrines to the people, should also be endued with an extraordinary character. *They marvelled*, we read, and *they took knowledge*; they were compelled to recollect, with full assurance of the fact and its consequences, that these men *had been with Jesus*.

Brethren, how many striking reflections must rise up in the mind of every serious reader of the Scriptures, on the recital of this memorable passage. May the blessed and eternal Spirit enable me to lay some of them before you with the utmost plainness, and to our mutual edification.

1st. The Bible is a wonderful book,—and the more it is read, heard, and explained, the more it will enlighten the minds of men, even when they are acquainted with no other learning. But my remarks will be confined to one, and that the principal portion of it, namely, the New Testament. O that all people could be thoroughly conversant with this precious record of the Divine will and know-

ledge! Only remember by whose inspiration it has been given, who is the author, and who the subject of it—only remember that He, in whom *are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*¹, did in these pages distribute of these treasures severally as he would; and you must admit, that every one deeply and intimately conversant with it, must think with an elevation of thought, and speak with a spirituality of language, unknown to the wit and wisdom of this world. Sometimes have I been surprised to hear from persons of little or no education, sentiments and even words denoting a deep acquaintance with the things of God. I speak not now of that teaching of the Spirit which is promised to the faithful suppliants for it, and which must produce a knowledge of heavenly subjects unattainable by the wisdom of this world. I know (for I come to the conclusion from our Lord's own declaration) that the things, hid from the wise and prudent, are revealed unto babes—that is, them who are

¹ Col. ii. 3.

ignorant of every other wisdom but “the wisdom which descendeth from above.” I am not now inquiring into causes. I am stating facts. I am not diving into the mode or manner of the mystery. I speak of the mystery itself—of the simple fact, that pious people, deeply and intimately conversant with the New Testament, are able to express themselves on subjects of religion and morals with a degree of clearness and spirituality, and a feeling of true piety, which no worldly education can give, and which no earth-born philosophy can engender. We may marvel—but the wonder ends when we take “knowledge of them that they have been with Jesus.”

There are two points in this branch of my discourse to which I must most seriously call your attention. The first is, the necessity of an intimate acquaintance with the sacred volume. This necessity I would impress on every one that hears me. Let the Bible be the principal book—the book prized above all others. It is impossible, brethren, to be thus intimately acquainted with it, without having your minds deeply

penetrated with holy and divine things, and without your conversation (though no express Scriptures may be quoted by you) partaking of that spiritual feeling to which Scripture only can accustom you. Think you not that the reader of the Bible is conversant with a history and a biography far excelling in interest and usefulness all that fills the shelves of the worldly man's worldly library? Think you not that a turn must be given to the thoughts, and a tendency must be imparted to the language, of those who are familiar with its sacred pages? If frivolity of sentiment, and levity of conversation, be the unavoidable result of a perpetual poring over the trivial publications which emanate from many a circulating library, what must be the opposite consequence of a deep knowledge of God's inspired volume? Must we not expect, that the mind will both naturally and supernaturally acquire a higher tone of thinking, and clothe its thoughts in language to which even angelic purity might listen? Must we not expect that the mind thus conversant with *the things of God*, will ob-

tain a dignity of sentiment, an unworldly, a spiritual, a heavenly character, suited to the heirs of immortality, and altogether worthy of the children of God.

Much do I lament, brethren, that I draw a picture, alas! very much from imagination; beautiful in theory, but seldom realized in practice. Much do I lament that even they, who profess to be serious on the subject of religion, are yet lamentably ignorant of the Holy Scriptures. Many read the Lessons for the day daily; many read the Psalms for the day. But they read in a formal manner. They read without feeling them in their heart. There is no meditation on them, no treasuring up of them in their memory. They are read; and the persons reading them go to their daily business. The morning exercise is forgotten: nothing remains, nothing adheres. A general impression may be made. But nothing distinct, nothing precise, nothing pointedly and decidedly influential is gained. The whole sacred volume may be read in this way, and the understanding be as little improved as the heart is affected.

I must therefore impress on you the second point for our consideration to which I have alluded.

It must be a pious reading of the Scriptures, else you may go through the whole New Testament, and no one who hears you speak, or sees you act, would take knowledge of you that you had been with Jesus. First, there must be prayer, prayer for the teaching of the Spirit, for his illuminating, quickening, and heart-controlling power to open the eyes of your understanding and take off the blindness of your hearts, in order that you may receive the things of the Spirit of God. *He shall receive of mine,* says our Lord, *of the Spirit, and shall show it unto you*¹. And when I know that the Lord of wisdom gives wisdom to them that ask it of him, and gives it liberally—when I know that *a man can receive nothing except it be given him from above*²—when I know on assured grounds, that this gracious promise was not confined to the Apostolical times, but that every true believer may

¹ St. John xvi. 14.

² Ibid. iii. 23.

hope that by God's blessing on his patient, humble, pious prayers and endeavours, he will be enriched in utterance and in knowledge, I do trust that to your heartfelt, persevering, and devout study of the Scriptures, a proficiency in spiritual knowledge will be granted. Not that you should be noisy, superficial, talkers. Such you would never be, if the Spirit rules your hearts and makes them humble as well as pious—but that you should gain Christian seriousness of conversation, that the Gospel spirit, Gospel rules and principles, should be settled in you; and every word, action, thought, and motive should prove to yourselves, and compel our adversaries to take “knowledge, that you have been with Jesus.” There would be no spiritual pride, no uncharitable superciliousness in them, who have thus been conversant with their lowly Master. He would speak to them of earthly things, and those things would guide their steps on earth. He would speak to them of heavenly things, and those things would lead their thoughts to heaven. The conversation of them who have thus

been with Jesus, would be in heaven ; and as Moses when he descended from the mount had glory on his countenance, which the carnal eye of the spectator beheld with amazement ; as the first martyr St. Stephen, full of the Holy Ghost, seemed to the enraged council as if his face had been the face of an angel ; so the true followers of Jesus, humble in heart, but pious and loving in all their affections, will show their deep acquaintance with his life, words, deeds, and death, by their purity, their heavenly mindedness, their abstraction from the world, from its selfish and unlovely spirit, its unrighteous and unholy ways.

I have hitherto dwelt on the general effects produced on them, who indeed have been with Jesus ; that is, have studied, with prayer and humility, the volume which speaks of our divine Master. I proceed in the second place to mention three specimens in particular of this saving, heart-regulating acquaintance with him, as he is portrayed to us in all the beauty of holiness. May it never be said of us, brethren, as it was predicted of the hardened race of

Israel—*He has no form nor comeliness in our sight, and in him there is no beauty that we should desire him*¹.

1. Christian brethren, let the world take knowledge of you—no matter whether it marvels or not at the change in you—let it take knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus, by your love of God above all things, or, as our Lord expresses it, by your loving him with all your heart and mind and strength. How difficult an attainment is this matter of injunction to the Christian world! But “with men it is impossible; with God all things are possible².” With the natural man—the man who acts from his natural feelings, sometimes accidentally leading him apparently right, but always, and in reality, and in the sight of God, betraying him into error of principle and of life; with such a man the love of God may and must seem an unattainable affection. But in this instance acquaint yourselves with Jesus, and be at peace. He who gave the command can give strength

¹ Isaiah liii. 2.

² St. Matt. xix. 26.

to obey it. "The love of God," as we learn from his Apostle, "is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us ¹." It can only be implanted there by the Spirit, who descended from him. And if you have it not, nor are seeking to have it, you cannot presume to have been with Jesus. But although it be the gift of the Spirit, it is his gift by his blessing on the means by which you are to obtain it. It comes not on you by any sudden impulse or miraculous infusion. It is God's own gift to them who seek him above all things. "*We love him*," says St. John, "*because he first loved us*" ²." And when, my brethren, "the Spirit bears witness with your spirit that you are the children of God" ³—when your inward thoughts, desires, and inclinations, prove that you have "the witness in yourselves,"—the witness of your decided devotedness to God, it must and will follow, that you will love him. It will not be a transient feeling. It

¹ Rom. v. 5.

² 1 St. John iv. 19.

³ Rom. viii. 16.

will be an abiding principle. In sorrow he will be your portion. In prosperity he will sanctify all your joys. You know what it is to love kindred and friends. Can you not therefore judge of yourselves whether you have the love of God in you—whether you do feel a supreme affection for the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? It is an internal feeling, and therefore must be a matter of consciousness. You cannot have it, and not know that you have it; you cannot be without it, and be insensible of the deficiency. Now, if by being with Jesus, knowing him, loving him, studying his words and actions, you have this holy fellowship with the Father, your love of God will show itself by many indubitable signs. When your thoughts and affections turn habitually to God; when the thoughts most familiar to your minds are thoughts of God and of the things of God, then you may take knowledge of yourselves “that you have been with Jesus.” You have not been with him, if you have not the love of the Father. “There is no genuine reli-

gion," says a pious writer¹, "no real contact of the heart with the best of beings, unless it makes us continually resort to him as our chief joy." Have you this witness within you? "O how love I thy law," says the Psalmist². And he who loves God, loves the word of God. How are you affected towards the people of God? "God has a people peculiarly his own; they are not of that world to which they outwardly belong. They belong not to it in spirit. How do you regard these decided followers of God? Do you shun their society with aversion and secret shame; or do you enjoy their communion as one of the most delightful of Christian privileges?" *We know*, says the Apostle, *that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren*⁴. How are you affected towards the present world? It is the character of faith to dwell much on eternity. If you can answer these ques-

¹ Robert Hall.² Ps. cxix. 97.³ Robert Hall.⁴ 1 St. John iii. 14.

tions to your consciences with heart-felt satisfaction, you will prove to yourselves that you know and love Jesus; and the world, when it thus sees you giving always the preference to the things of God above self and selfish feelings, above the world, and worldly thoughts and motives, will take "knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus."

2. Heavenly-mindedness is another effect produced by a saving knowledge of, and habitual communion with, your Lord and Saviour. Take the Apostles for your examples. Be followers of them as they were of him whom you profess to love. *We look not, say they, at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal*¹. *Our conversation is in heaven*². The genuine Christian, the true lover of his Lord, and the diligent, praying reader of his word, will always feel himself a stranger upon earth. No splendour, no dignity, no emo-

¹ 2 Cor. xiv. 18.

² Phil. iii. 20.

lument of this world, not all the fascinations of its gayest and most enticing scenes, would ever tempt him to feel or say, "Here would I dwell, for I have a delight therein." No: his language would rather be, *I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ*; though for further usefulness, for greater spiritual advancement, for friends, for kindred, for children, and for society, he is content to sojourn here below, and to say, as St. Paul did, "*To abide in the flesh is more needful for*" them. Still his heart is in heaven; and that heart can sympathize with the Psalmist in sentiments like these,—"*As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake in thy likeness*"¹. Is this your feeling? Then we "take knowledge of you, that you have been with Jesus."

Lastly. The true friend and acquaintance of his Lord, he who makes "the statutes of that Lord his song," that is, his delight and study "in the house of his pilgrimage," learns of a meek and lowly

¹ Ps. xvii. 15.—Bib. Vers.

Master to be meek and lowly like himself. Angry passions, contemptuous expressions, irritating language, and unconciliating tempers, become not him who professes to sit at the feet of Jesus, and to hear his words. Would you call fire from heaven, as two of his disciples once would have done, to consume a suspected enemy? Would you return railing for railing, and would you curse and not bless? Would you refuse to be gentle in your households, towards acquaintances and friends, as well as kindred; unlike St. Paul, who was "*gentle even as a nurse cherisheth her own children, effectually desirous of their welfare,*" as he tells the Thessalonians: would you in any instance refuse to imitate the meekness and gentleness of Christ; then Christ would say to you, "*Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of*¹." Ye are not my followers, nor have ye received of my spirit. Brethren, let others take knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus, by your meekness of temper, by your patience, by

¹ St. Luke ix. 55.

your mutual forbearance and mutual forgiveness. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness¹."

My limits admonish me to close the discourse. I close it, brethren, with my prayer for you, (and I ask your prayers for me,) that in all things we may show forth the spirit and mind of Christ Jesus, so that we may "*provoke others to love and good works*," and that they, seeing our Christian life and conversation, may glorify our Father in heaven, and take knowledge of us, that in his word, and in his sacraments, and in his house and ordinances, we have to a saving and spiritualizing purpose "been with Jesus."

¹ Gal. v. 22.

SERMON II.

THE UNWORLDLY CHARACTER OF OUR LORD
AND HIS APOSTLES RECOMMENDED.

ST. JOHN xvii. 16.

“ They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”

THERE are certain passages of Scripture, which at times lay hold of the attention and feelings of the true Christian with no ordinary force. Thus for instance, when the words of the text occur to him at a season in which the world has disappointed him—in which some expectation fondly cherished has deceived him, and some friendship, trusted in with unshaken confidence, has failed; he is soothed and comforted to find, that as he is not of the world, so he looks not to the world for his hap-

piness. Then again, when his faith and patience are tried by some sore affliction—when all earthly prospects are marred by some bereavement, by the loss of a child in whom his affections were centred, or by any other death which breaks asunder some tender tie, he rejoices to hear, that, as the Saviour was not of the world, so neither must his followers be. He feels it to be a disappointing and deceiving world, no place on which the passing sojourner can fix the sole of his foot, and say, *Here is my resting place*; “*it is good for me to be here.*” At such times the Gospel received into the heart, and through the Spirit of Christ, pouring its consolations on the soul of the believer, manifests itself as the soother of every disappointment and sorrow. The true believer, you must remember, stands complete in Christ; through Christ he is accounted righteous before God; and I would ask, without the fear of being contradicted by such as know these things, know them spiritually and feel them practically, whether a Christian with such graces, feelings, and hopes, pious in heart

and strong in faith, does not rise above the world, and obtain the mastery over it. "*I am persuaded,*" says St. Paul, in one of those bursts of feeling which raised him above himself, "*I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*¹." Such is the blessed effect of that true faith, and of those heavenly feelings, by which the true followers of Christ are not of the world, even as their Lord was not of it.

But in order to make the subject edifying to us, and excite us to the cultivation of that Christian temper from which such great blessings flow, it will be necessary to consider the text with care and attention.

The words are to be found in the prayer which Christ offered to the Father just before his crucifixion and death. To enter on any analysis of this prayer, would occupy

¹ Rom. viii. 38, 39.

more than one discourse. On many accounts it deserves the serious consideration of advanced Christians, as it relates to the higher mysteries of our religion. There is one point of view, under which it is at all times delightful to consider it: as portraying in a solemn communion between our Lord and the Father, the characters of eleven of the Apostles. These simple-minded and single-hearted men, to whom, under God, the world is indebted for the early propagation of the Christian faith, are here described in a manner which exalts them in the estimation of the Christian. It fell to their lot, through their efforts to spread the religion of their Master, to be esteemed "the filth and the offscouring of the world." But in this passage of Scripture, their "record is with the Most High." Their Lord, who knew their characters, and to whom their motives were well known, declares of them on this solemn occasion, that they were God's, his own choice, his own peculiar care. "Thine they were, and Thou gavest them me," and a cha-

racter is recorded of them, which, it would be well for us, if we could purchase with the wealth of worlds, did we possess it. "They have kept Thy word." And if we duly consider how much is comprised in this short description, how it ennobles the lowest and enriches the poorest disciple to be assured, that he has kept the word of God, we can look on nothing as wanting to complete the spiritual character of the first preachers of the Gospel. Would God, that all their successors in the Ministry had imbibed the same spirit: the ministry then would not be blamed through the pride of our hearts, and the worldliness of our affections; and the earthen vessels (for such St. Paul, amidst all his high attainments, was humble enough to call himself and his fellow labourers,) *the earthen vessels* in which the treasures of Christ are or should be deposited, would through divine grace be purified from every sordid and unholy taint, and be in every respect vessels of honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use; prepared according to their capacity to pour out their treasures

for the edification, consolation, and warning of sinful, but redeemed man.

In considering the text, the first subject of inquiry is, who and what may be meant by the world, of which our Lord said that he was not, and that his disciples were not. *They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.*

Now we are to remember, that St. John speaks of the whole world as lying in wickedness¹, and that St. Paul speaks of this present evil world as a state of things, out of which the followers of Christ are to be called and delivered². It is evident, both on sacred and profane authority, that, at the time when Christ came, and when his faith was preached throughout all nations, great was the prevailing iniquity. The specimens, afforded us in the Epistles of St. Paul of heathen depravity, strike the mind with terror. They show us a people without any religious restraints, unawed by a fear or even a belief of God, and given up to *work all uncleanness with greediness.*

¹ 1 St. John v. 19.

² Gal. i. 4.

But the description of the world, as it applied to the first Christians, must be taken from the accounts given of the Jews ; because they formed a Church, and enjoyed all the benefits of a revelation from heaven. Consider their character, as described in Scripture, and you may form a just notion of the world to which our Lord alludes. He speaks of their learned and professed teachers as “ blind leaders of the blind,” as evading the commandments of God under the most trivial pretexts, as great observers of forms and ceremonies to the very letter, while wanting in the spirit of godliness. That a people, under such instructors, should fall into errors of opinion, and sins in practice, was naturally to be expected : and the world, as it was found among God’s favoured people, lay as much as the heathen world in the wickedness spoken of by the Apostle. It must have arrived at great depravity, when our Lord should say to the multitude, *Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law*¹, and on another occasion,

¹ St. John vii. 19.

*I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you*¹. This declaration is most important on the subject, because it shows the spirit which actuated this evil world, and points out the source from which all this iniquity flowed. Here was a people, unlike the heathens, professing to know God, jealous of his honour, and wishing to be thought devoted to his service. Notwithstanding this, they had not the love of God in them; a mere unmeaning profession; the heart not devoted to God, and therefore the life inconsistent with the profession; and the commandments of God not kept, because God did not rule as the supreme possessor of their affections. Of this world our Lord assuredly was not, and of this world his Apostles were not. Out of it they had been chosen; the word of life they had received; they had accepted Christ as their Lord; and notwithstanding a weak faith at first, and many false and mistaken views of the kingdom which he was establishing, still they were not ac-

¹ St. John v. 42:

tuated by the spirit of the world: and on that account, through the power of divine grace, they proceeded from strength to strength, until at length the same mind, which had been in their Master, was in them. *They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.*

I do not desire to strain the text to any unattainable purpose. I do not desire to drive you from the activities or from the endearments of life; I would not that you should be morose and unsocial beings; I would not that you should go out of the world, and neither perform your duties in it, nor cultivate friendships, nor enjoy the delights of rational and improving intercourse with each other. I desire to see you not of the world, any more than your Lord was not of it; to hear of you and to know of you, as possessing the same mind which was in Christ Jesus, and as being followers of his unworldly Apostles, as they were of their unworldly Master.

Let us therefore endeavour to trace some marks of this unworldly spirit, (for the subject is too copious for a single discourse)

by which in the midst of business, of occupation, of all the allowable activities and even enjoyments of Christians, you may deserve the character given by our Lord. "*They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.*" We will hear therefore what our Lord says of himself: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work ¹." The great truth and mystery contained in this interpretation is, That the will of God is the food of the soul. "What makes," says an old pious author on this remarkable passage, "what makes the miseries of the world so tedious to men; what makes their souls sick and faint under their burthen, either of duty or of perplexity, but eating of that poisonous fruit, our own wills?" "*Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business* ²," was his question at an early period of his life in the days of his flesh, when he was found postponing every thing to the love and knowledge of God. "*I must work the works of him that sent me,*" was another of

¹ St. John iv. 34.

² St. Luke ii. 49.

his declarations, "*while it is day—the night cometh, when no man can work* ¹." And at the close of his ministry, in his last public prayer to the Father, this was the triumphant avowal which he made on contemplating his entire obedience to the will of God: "*I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do* ²."

We have now obtained a clear view of the spirit which actuated our Lord, while he appeared as man on earth; an entire obedience to the will of God, a supreme love of God, an exclusive reference of every motive and every action to the favour and approbation of God. This, then, being the ruling principle, observe how his conduct, that part more especially which is imitable by us, was guided and controlled and regulated. We see him, it is true, at a marriage feast; and we see him even ministering to the comfort and accommodation of the party. But what do we read afterwards? "*This beginning of miracles did*

¹ St. John ix. 4.

² Ibid. xvii. 4.

*Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him*¹; so that the glory of God, and the eternal good of others were in this instance the motives of his conduct, and the rules and guides of it. He accepted the invitation of Matthew and of Zaccheus the publicans; he sat down with publicans and sinners. Why was this? "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. *I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*"². Was our Lord active or inactive in his employment on earth? Let his journey through cities, villages, and all parts of Galilee, bear witness to his activity: let the miracles do the same; miracles, which occupied whole days in their performance, so that his friends laid hold on him, for they said, *He is beside himself*³, that is, worn out and exhausted. Was our Lord active or inactive? No doubt can remain on our minds, that all his energies as man, and all the

¹ St. John ii. 11.² St. Matt. ix. 12, 13.³ St. Mark iii. 21.

faculties of the body which he had assumed for our sakes, were devoted to the glory of God and the eternal good of man. The world in which he moved, the persons among whom he thus laboured, were actuated by a spirit altogether different. They were selfish, for they followed him for the loaves and fishes. They were proud, for they scoffed at him as the friend of publicans and sinners; they sought honour from men, for they said, "*Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him* ¹." They were afraid of the censure of men, for some, as we read, were his disciples, but secretly, for fear of the Jews. But was he of the world in these respects? Was he selfish? "*The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head* ²." See him wearied and hungry at Jacob's well in Samaria. It was the hour of dinner, and the disciples had gone into the city to buy food. An opportunity meanwhile occurred of saving the soul of a sinner. His disci-

¹ St. John vii. 48.

² St. Matt. viii. 20.

ples having returned, "prayed him, saying, Master, eat. But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of¹." His superiority to all selfish considerations, all desire of seeking comfort and accommodation to himself while a single soul could benefit by his instructions, was shown in his rebuke of Martha, for her being cumbered with so much anxiety and careful serving for him. Was he proud? "*Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master have washed your feet; ye ought also to wash one another's feet*²." Was he proud? No! Heaven and earth bear witness to his humility! The glory in heaven of which he emptied himself, the sufferings on earth to which he submitted, do indeed manifest his unparalleled humility. The time fails me to proceed with our Lord's unworldly character. During all this time, attentive to every outward religious observance, spending also a whole night in private prayer to God, and at the close of it all, manifesting

¹ St. John iv. 31, 32. ² Ibid. xiii. 13, 14.

an entire resignation to the will of God. Remember, that to seek their own will is the never failing distinction between the children of the world and the sons of God.

The Apostles, as soon as they were gifted with the Holy Spirit of God, were not of the world any more than their Master had been of it. Think of them, after they had been beaten by the council, and commanded not to speak in the name of Jesus, departing from that council, and "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name¹?" Must it not be an unworldly spirit, which will endure pain and disgrace for the salvation of souls, and the honour of our Lord? It must be an unworldly spirit, which prompts to disinterested labours, and to the endurance of actual sufferings for these high and holy purposes. It must be an unworldly spirit, which, in the path of duty, knows "how to be abased, and how to abound: how to be full and to be hungry, how to abound and to suffer need, how to do all

¹ Acts v. 41.

things through Christ which strengtheneth it¹." It must be an unworldly spirit, which joys and rejoices even when it spends and is spent for others; which in all things glorifies God, and seeks the favour of Christ; which abstains from every thing, however naturally to be sought for and desired, "whereby a brother stumbleth or is offended, or is made weak²," which in the most common actions of life does all to the glory of God; which is "sorrowful" (for sorrow is the lot of the religious as well as worldly) yet "alway rejoicing," which endures as "seeing him who is invisible;" which "through honour and dishonour, through evil report and good report," is always consistent and the same, devoted to God and Christ, bearing its cross, keeping the faith, preserving unimpaired its own purity, and, in the midst of the world, and all its necessary cares and duties, can breathe that noble ejaculation: *To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* Such were the Apostles: and such, in our

¹ Phil. v. 12, 13.² Rom. xiv. 21.

several stations and as of the ability and measure of gifts and graces imparted to us, must we be, if we would possess the same unworldly spirit.

My brethren, this is no unattainable state of perfection to which I would this day lead your thoughts and desires. In these respects, and in many more, to which your spiritual study of the Scriptures would, through the teaching of the Spirit, assuredly conduct your minds, you may be no more of the world, than your Lord and His Apostles were of it. Let the glory of God be the governing principle; the love of Christ the animating motive; the seeking for the holy influences of the Spirit your constraining pursuit and desire; the salvation of your own souls and the souls of others your hope and aim; and you will exhibit proofs of the same unworldly character. All business may be carried on; all households managed; every worldly duty performed; families taught, reared, and decently, not sumptuously and immoderately, provided for; society kept together, benefited, and improved; all this may

be done, and will more effectually and religiously than otherwise be done, by those who are actuated by the Spirit of Christ, and have nothing of the world within them. Varying and discordant opinions are entertained even by Christians in respect to the lawfulness of amusements, and many other objects of a secular tendency. But let us be no more of the world than our Lord and his Apostles were, and I should soon anticipate a cordial unanimity of opinion among all the followers of Christ Jesus our Lord.

One word more and I have done. As soon as our Lord had given this character of his Apostles, he added this prayer, "*Sanctify them through thy truth: Thy word is truth*"¹. The Holy Spirit of God is the mighty agent in the sanctification of the heart of the believer. But the holy word of God is one of the means, and a powerful means it is, of promoting this holy work within our souls. I do not mean a careless, formal, superficial knowledge of

¹ St. John xvii. 17.

the divine word. I mean such a deep, soul-influencing study of that word, as produces (under the Spirit, we must remember) a spiritual apprehension, an inward digesting of it. The Scripture is the food of the spiritual man. His cravings after it are like the hunger of the natural man. Nor is he ever satisfied, until it is so mixed up with his daily, nay, his hourly sustentation and growth in grace, that on all occasions the written word is, in its spirit, not in the letter only, the guide of his thoughts, words, and actions. The experimentalist in philosophy and the arts will say, I will try this substance, I will analyze it, I will bring it to the test of actual experience. So must the spiritual man do with the word of God. I will try this thought, this desire, these words and these deeds by the test of the spirit of God's word. I will analyze and sift them through all their ingredients. Nor will I ever, with God's grace, say a word, or think a thought, or do a deed, which is at variance with the spiritual tendency and design of the sanctifying truth of the Gospel of Christ. Thus search the

40 THE UNWORLDLY CHARACTER, &c.

Scriptures; and from them through God's Spirit, will flow rivers of living waters to refresh and purify your souls under the blessing, and through the availing intercession of Him who was their subject, their author, and their end, our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

SERMON III.

THE CHASTENINGS OF SORROW, AND MORE
ESPECIALLY OF SIN, BORNE WITHOUT SUB-
DUING US.

2 Cor. vi. 9.

“ . . . as chastened, and not killed.”

It is not only delightful, but, with the divine blessing, it will be most salutary, to consider the declared experience of Christians, who have passed through the same troubled and sinful world as that in which we live. Their outward circumstances may vary materially from our own; their internal feelings may differ; they may have advanced considerably further than ourselves in convictions of sin, and in hopes and assurances of pardon and salvation;

but in two respects we all resemble them. In these two respects every congregation of Christians is like unto one in the days of the Apostles ; and we, their successors in the ministerial office, are in these respects like also unto the first preachers of the glad tidings of the Gospel. We are all passing through a sinful and sorrowful world. Sin and sorrow were the characters of the age in which the Apostles lived ; no one will deny that they also embitter our cup in this our earthly sojourning. The Apostles were miraculously inspired by the Holy Ghost to lead their congregations, whether by word or letter, into all truth ; they spake with tongues, and prophesied ; they had gifts of healing, and were even able, in the name of their Lord, to raise the dead. Even their converts received the same precious gifts, and were favoured with different manifestations of the miraculous operations of the Spirit ; that self-same Spirit dividing to every man severally as he will. Still, however, they were men of like passions, feelings, and infirmities with ourselves ; undergoing severer trials

of afflictions, but afflicted they were. They felt the plague of their own hearts. The great Apostle himself, though he delighted in the law of God after the inward man, still felt the rebellious strivings of an evil nature within him, and, though he was able to look to divine strength for overcoming it, and did thank God through his Lord Jesus Christ for his victory over it, still felt the law of sin within him¹. We therefore, my brethren, we who are here assembled to worship the same triune Jehovah, whom Apostles and Apostolic Churches have worshipped before us; we who have the same Spirit, as they miraculously enjoyed, to lead us into truth and holiness; the same word to instruct us, the same heavenly Master to guide, and comfort us now, and to save our souls in the day of death and of judgment, we can, by the teaching of the same Spirit, apply to ourselves their several experiences, and derive material benefit from the application.

The Apostle could say of himself, of his

¹ Rom. vii.

fellow-labourers in the ministry, of his fellow Christians at large, *We are chastened, but not killed.* He could cast a tender and pitying eye on his fellow Apostles going forth into an evil world, "as lambs in the midst of wolves," utterly defenceless, save as an omnipotent arm supported and protected them. He could cast the same pitying eye on the Churches founded by them, and the congregations established therein; and find just cause to say unto them all, that no man should be moved by these afflictions, for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto¹. Your heavenly Master, even when he was bequeathing the legacy of divine peace to his Church, foretold that it must have tribulation; and universal experience has borne its testimony to this truth, "that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God²." Inspired as he was with that Spirit, who sees beyond the surface of things, beyond bodily influences and material enemies, the Apostle discerned a host

¹ 1 Thess. iii. 3.

² Acts xiv. 22.

of infernal spirits warring against the faith and steadfastness of God's elect. He could see principalities and powers, legions of fallen angels, attempting to deceive, as our Lord foretold, if it were possible, even the elect, and reducing to the same ruin in which they were involved, even them who are called with a holy calling. Notwithstanding, however, all these evils from within and from without, notwithstanding outward persecutions and inward conflicts, notwithstanding both sin and sorrow, he could say of himself, and of all true children of God through Christ Jesus, though we are chastened, yet we are not killed.

In order, my brethren, to make this transporting declaration of the Apostle available to our mutual edification, I propose, with the divine blessing, to consider it under an enlarged application.

I shall first consider our own state, in this our warfare, as we are exposed to the chastenings both of sin and sorrow.

2. The behaviour of professed Christians under them, their success or their failure in the perilous warfare; and,

3. The source of Christian triumph ; the indestructible nature of that consoling and triumphant faith, which prevents such chastening from ending in the destruction of the soul. *Chastened and not killed.*

An application of the whole to our own circumstances shall close the discourse.

May the Holy Spirit be with our spirits.

First, then ; Man is born to sorrow, even as the sparks fly upwards. This is the mournful acknowledgment in the most ancient book of Scripture. And from that period of the world to the present day, all experience proves the truth of holy Job's declaration. I need not attempt to substantiate it by appealing to yourselves. "Behold thou hast made my days as an handbreadth, and mine age is as nothing before thee¹." "*In the morning it is green and groweth up, but in the evening it is cut down, dried up, and withered*²." "*If a man live many years, and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many*³." We enjoy numerous

¹ Ps. xxxix. 5. ² Ps. xc. 6.

³ Eccles. xi. 8.

mercies from the hand of our heavenly Father; and there is not one of us who cannot be prepared to say, that the Lord has been gracious to him beyond his deservings. "I am less than the least of all thy mercies," must be the confession of the most favoured saint, as it was of the patriarch of old. But chastenings we must all expect; and chastenings, I have no doubt, we have all in one way or other received. Happy is the Christian, who does indeed view them as chastenings; not as mere accidents of life, but as divine providences, mercifully ordered to wean the soul from its attachment to earthly things, and to raise its affections to that state of which the blessed condition is, that there shall be in it neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain. Happy the Christian, who looks on disappointment, sickness, loss of friends, on the various and almost daily inconveniences, which he meets with here, the difficulties, the discourtesies, uneasinesses, affronts, and injuries; happy is the Christian, who looks on all these things as designed to

subdue his self-will, his excessive fondness for earthly advantages, his pride, impatience, and discontent. Happy is the Christian, who can adopt St. Paul's language, and say of himself, I am chastened, but not killed. A gracious Lord sustains my faith, supports my patience, and enables me at all times, under daily crosses, whether great or small, to say, Thy will be done. In all things thy time shall be my time, thy way my way, thy will my will. Thy will be done, when and as thou wilt.

But, brethren, the chastenings arising from inward and outward sins deserve your serious consideration. Can you say in these instances, *chastened and not killed*—that is, can you say, "*when I would do good evil is present with me*—I feel a law in my members warring against the law of my mind"¹ I feel some inclination, some inward propensity contending for the mastery, and striving against my better judgment in bringing me into subjection to the law of sin. I feel the plague of my heart on many

¹ Rom. vii.

occasions, but in one particular instance, I feel it more powerfully than in any other ; but, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." I thank my God for making me "more than conqueror through him that loved me." Who among us can use this glorious language? who can—in the presence of an all searching God,—thus receive the joyful testimony of conscience to this noble proof of Christian faith and self-denial? We have great need of the strictest examination of our hearts and all their movements. For want of such examination, what numbers live and die in utter ignorance of themselves ; with loose notions of Christian duty, drawn not from the Bible, but from the sentiments and customs of the world, with inadequate conceptions of God's fearful justice and holy law, with equally ill-founded trust on his mercy, with a mere formal lip acknowledgment of a redeeming Saviour. Here lies the mischief ; hence proceeds the inconsistency between Christian profession and the practices of professing Christians. Hence it is that we form some habits of life, entertain some par-

ticular sentiments, engage in some course of life, which are at utter variance with the Divine law and commandments, and never escape from the bondage to which we thus fearfully enslave ourselves. Hence it is that outward chastisements are not made inward chastenings. We come out of the furnace, tried it is true, but not purified. We do not grow wiser by experience ; we continue to be imposed upon by the deceitfulness of our hearts ; day passes after day, year succeeds to year, ordinances are attended to from week to week, and from month to month, leaving us just as they found us ; no increase of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, no growth in grace, no progress in sanctification ; our inward nature not renewed, nay, perhaps, the foundation yet to be laid ; a spiritual life yet to be begun within us ; no ripeness for the kingdom of God, no preparation, no meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light.

This leads me, in the second place, to the next subject of the discourse, the behaviour of professed Christians under chastenings ; their success or failure in the perilous war-

fare. . "Look around this congregation. We are all," I quote the words of a pious modern writer¹; "more or less the children of sorrow: there is not one of us, who has not within him some known or secret cause of disquietude. Now bring a messenger from heaven, and let him ask each one of us what sorrow he shall take from us, what spring of grief in our breasts he shall close; how various, could we speak out, would be our answers. But it would be only the true children of God, they who know the plagues of the heart, and feel convictions of heart derived from the Holy Spirit, who would answer, Take sin away from me. Remove from me that source of all evil. Let each one of us then ask himself, What makes me most wretched? What do I deem the greatest affliction of my life? Over what, during the last week, have I most frequently and heavily mourned? Is it sickness, pain, or poverty? Is it the loss of this relative, or that friend? Is it my baffled schemes and blighted prospects? Is it mortified vanity or dis-

¹ Bradley.

appointed hope, or wounded, or thwarted, or stifled affection? Or is it the Christian's one great affliction,—sin, the sin of my heart, the pollution of my soul." Herein now, my brethren, lies the great difference between sincere and merely nominal Christians. A broad line of demarcation, a well-defined boundary is between them; not marked out by the changing opinions of a vain world, but by the immutable word of the Godhead. The sincere Christian sorrows over sin as his indwelling enemy, strives against it as his chief pollution, and labours to conquer it as his deadliest foe. I admit that the higher he advances in the Christian progress, the more he becomes acquainted with his own heart; and the more he reflects on God's most holy law, the stronger is his detestation of sin, and the more laborious his struggles to subdue it. His is a perpetual warfare; a warfare of all others the most dangerous, because his enemy is always nigh to him. In privacy and in solitude, as well as in his family and in the world, this bosom foe is always ready to disturb his tranquillity, and de-

stroy his hope of heaven. All his senses are avenues through which the enemy can pierce him ; all situations and circumstances present a field on which the war is carried on. But the true Christian is armed for the conflict. *Chastened, not killed*, is the motto which he bears on his armour. Here and there the arrow may strike, and with a powerful blow ; but it strikes on an impenetrable shield. He finds and laments that he should find a law of sin warring in his members against a conscience which the word of God enlightens, and to which the Spirit of God, and of Christ, has given a delicacy and a tenderness unknown to the followers of the world. But he exclaims, in the language of the apostle, "*Sin shall not have dominion over me.*" And wherefore? Because I am not under the killing covenant of the law. I am not left to the inward impulses of nature. I am under grace. I am under the protection of covenanted grace. I am under that "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus which hath made me free from the law of sin and death ¹."

¹ Romans viii. 2.

Turn now, my brethren, to the other class of the Christian world, to the merely professing Christian, to him who bears the name of Christ; but, unlike his Lord, is not armed with the Spirit in the wilderness of this world. Does he strive against the indwelling foe? No. He yields to it without a struggle. Does he keep under his body, and bring it into subjection? No. He gives to every appetite an uncontrolled and uncontrollable sway. Does he think his own heart his greatest enemy? No. He counts it his best friend, and listens to all its suggestions as speaking "the law of kindness?" Does he profess to overcome the world? No. The customs of the world are his Master, and its maxims are his laws. Does he believe that there are invisible, because spiritual foes, with whom the child of God must wrestle? No. He forms not his notions of these things from the revelation of his God. He is a man of reason perhaps, and will believe only what he sees, or what his vain imagination can comprehend. The things which the Spirit of God reveals are foolishness to

him. He cannot relish them, because they are spiritually discerned ¹. And that spiritual discernment is a gift of the Spirit; and he knows not, or affects to know not, "whether there be any Holy Ghost." Or he is a man of business; he has no time for reading or studying his Bible. He hears a Sunday morning sermon, but, if it treats of the marvellous things of God's kingdom of grace, it finds no chord in his heart on which to vibrate, no soil in that heart prepared to receive the word. He hears, and hears not; the next day, the next day do I say? the next hour, all is forgotten. He is in the world—the world is his master, its customs are his law, money his God, and heaven and heavenly things too distant, too remote, too indefinable to enter into his calculation. Or he is a man of pleasure, of fashion, of amusement. Talk to him of self-denial, talk to him of a daily cross, tell him that the loss of the soul is infinitely more than the loss of a lust, and God's favour more valuable than the gain-

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 14.

ing of a whole world; talk to him thus, and you do not meet him on common ground. He has no ideas common with yours. You and he are dwelling in different worlds. Your language is that of a heavenly country, his of an earthly one. And an Apostle has told us the difference between the wisdom which belongs to the one and to the other. The wisdom which is from above is first pure, the wisdom that descendeth not from above is earthly, sensual, devilish ¹. Chastened and killed is the end of the ungodly. They are not exempted either from sorrow or from sin. But in the house of mourning their hearts are not made better, and in the moment of temptation they fall. Theirs are not the siftings of Satan, who tries God's servants and whose faith his siftings cannot destroy, because a faithful Saviour intercedes for them and protects them. They have not recovered themselves out of the snare of the devil. They are led captive by him at his will ².

¹ St. James iii. 15, 16.

² 2 Tim. ii. 26.

I proceed now, my brethren, in the last place, to the source of that triumph which the children of God enjoy, when in this troubled and sinful world they hold the Apostolic language, and say, *Chastened, and not killed*. What preserves them in a scene of so much evil and temptation? What prevents their feet from falling, when the road is rough, slippery, and dangerous? What is it which enables them to bear about with them a deadly foe, and yet to be more than conquerors? How is it that in their case sorrow loses its power to distress, and sin its ability to destroy? What! always in the battle, and yet not defeated; always attacked, and yet still more or less successful. It must be something exalting them above the common condition of humanity. It must be an armour not derived from the wisdom of this world, nor cleansed by its polluting touch, nor cemented by its weak and powerless strength. Assuredly it is, my brethren. The believer gains his strength from above. Remember his Lord's promise. It is not simply that he shall be

conqueror; but he shall be *more than conqueror* through Him who loves him. A believer, led by the Spirit, and supported by the Spirit, is a sort of supernatural being. He is a paradox to himself, as well as to the world around him. What! a poor mortal creature, with sickness and death always before him! and yet able to say, "*I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better:*" however, as if submitting to live for the sake of others, "to abide in the flesh is more needful for you¹." What! a weak and fallible and sinful creature exalted above himself, and able to say, "The law of the Spirit of life hath made me free from the law of sin and of death." *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*². What! a wavering, inconsistent, fickle, changeable creature able to say, *When I am weak, then I am strong*. When I am minded to do a Christian duty, do I use lightness; or the things that I purpose, do I purpose accord-

¹ Phil. i. 23, 24.² Phil. iv. 13.

ing to the flesh ; that with me there should be yea, yea, and nay, nay ; as God is true, he which stablisheth me in Christ, is God ¹. What ! a creature like man, in this world of sorrow and of sin, chastened by both, afflicted with the evils of life on the one hand, and drawn away with the evils of his own inward corrupt nature on the other, able to say, " Sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing ; dying and behold we live ; chastened, and not killed." This man must be endued, you will say, with supernatural strength. This man, my brethren, is the Christian ; the true Christian ; the believer ; the child of God, " living his life in the flesh by the faith of the Son of God ;" and therefore, when sin points its arrows within him, *Chastened, but not killed* ; when sorrow wounds him, chastened and still not killed ; and even when death destroys this mortal body, able then to commit himself into the hands " of a merciful Creator, and most loving Saviour," with his Lord's own declaration on his lips and in his heart :

¹ 2 Cor. i. 17, 18. 21.

Though I be dead, yet shall I live. I am a believer, and therefore I shall never die¹. Such are the triumphs of a true faith; such the power derived by a true Christian from the Lord whom he loves and serves; such the conquest gained over an evil heart and an evil world through "Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood."

A short application shall conclude the discourse. To the law and to the testimony, my brethren. Take the Bible unto your hands; you cannot judge of a book unless you read it; take it seriously into your hands, and try to discover what it is to be a Christian. But the Bible is the gift of God to man; it proceeds from the inspiration of his Spirit. Its language is the language of the Spirit. The things about which it is conversant are spiritual things. You cannot therefore understand it, as spiritual men should do, unless there be something within you superadded to your own natural understanding. Read it there-

¹ St. John xi. 25, 26.

fore under the guidance and teaching of the Spirit. It appeals to the heart. But the heart is averse to it by nature. The heart is unprepared of itself to receive the appeal. The Spirit is "the Paraclete, or Advocate," to plead the cause in your souls. That advocate must be listened to, or the appeal is made in vain. You are surrounded with temptations. I know the trials which your hearts will and do endure. But the word of God under his Spirit is an armoury of weapons, wherewith to combat all temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Follow your Saviour's example in his fiery trial¹. There are three positions on which the Lord took his stand. Take yours on the same. First, "Man shall live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Thus let divine ordinances, heavenly communion, scriptural reading be your food: the means, under his blessing remember, of keeping yourselves stedfast in the faith. Second, "*It is written.*" Jesus withstands the devil by the written word. Let the Bible be so

¹ Preached in the first Sunday in Lent.

familiar to you, that you may always have a word in season to meet every temptation. Third, "Get thee hence Satan, for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve ¹." Here take your stand: drive from you the artful companion, that Satan in the flesh, who beguiles your souls; drive from you the tempter, whether he comes to you in the shape of a dangerous book, or an insinuating seducer, or even if he should assume the most bewitching appearance ². Get thee hence! this must be the feeling of thine heart, whether it be, or be not the language of thy lips: Get thee hence, thou destroyer of my soul and of its everlasting peace! And may the Spirit of God so awaken and so enlighten us as to make us "see the things that belong to our everlasting peace," and cause us stedfastly to pursue the same through the grace mercifully promised to all who truly seek for it, through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

¹ St. Matt. iv. 4. 6, 7. 10.

² 2 Cor. xi. 14.

SERMON IV.

ON THE CHARACTER OF LYDIA.

Acts xvi. 14.

“ . . . whose heart the Lord opened.”

THERE are some female characters, both in the Old and New Testament, which discover strong proofs of prevailing piety and spiritual religion. Ruth, for instance, is an example of that power of divine grace, which, when fully received into the soul, and acted on with a steady purpose, is capable of surmounting every difficulty of outward circumstances, and of making the person possessing it a decided adherent to the Lord's side. The passage of Scripture, in which the words of the text occur, introduces us to another character of the

same decided piety, the character of Lydia. She is represented as a person, who, being under the influence of divine grace, steadily advanced from one spiritual improvement to another, until she became a complete follower of the Lord. I feel it the more necessary to bring a character of this kind before your notice, because it will tend to remove every objection, which the followers of the world advance, when they allege the inconsistency of a decidedly religious spirit with the daily avocations of life, and with the duties of our respective stations. Such instances of practical and undeviating piety, occurring in a rank of society which frequently brings along with it a worldly spirit, are calculated to do great service to the cause of religion. They prove, by fact and experience, that industry may be practised, and secular concerns attended to, without so absorbing the soul, as to make it incapable of religious feelings, or so filling up the time, as to leave no leisure for high spiritual attainments.

In the course of his travels through Greece, Paul arrived at Philippi, a city of

Macedonia. There we are told that Lydia resided. This woman was a native of Thyatira, but was a retailer of purple cloth in the place where she had settled. By nation therefore she was an Asiatic, by religion, if it can be called so, a Gentile. We read, however, that *she worshipped God*, by which is meant, that she had ceased to be an idolatress, and had become a proselyte to the Jewish religion. This circumstance of itself would show a person caring about her soul, and, with a view of promoting the salvation of that soul, willing to leave the errors of the superstition in which she had been educated, and to join the Jews in the worship of the one true God. Greatly does this behaviour speak to her praise. It manifests a well-disposed person, open to religious impressions, and solicitous to improve her heart and understanding by the study of God's revealed law. We cannot be surprised to find (speaking after the manner of men) that the sincere desire of religious knowledge, which had led her to the synagogue, where God was worshipped, and to the searching

of the Scriptures, in which God had revealed himself, should prompt her to seek for farther information from the new preachers who had visited her city. In speaking thus, I speak after the natural man. But spiritual things are spiritually discerned; and when a person continues thus to seek for farther knowledge of such things, the desire is not the natural craving of the human heart. It is the gift of God's preventing, illuminating, and assisting grace. Accordingly, Lydia instantly became a hearer of the Apostle. She, who already possessed grace, felt an increasing desire of more. *She heard us*, as the historian says. The effect of such hearing was, that *the Lord opened her heart to attend unto the things which were spoken of Paul*. She thus became a convert to the Christian faith. Into the covenant of God through grace she was by the sacrament of baptism admitted, together with her household; and her first care was to show the kindness of a converted heart, by administering in temporal things to them, through whom her welfare in spiritual things had been pro-

moted. *She besought us, as we read (for the sacred historian was himself at this time a companion of St. Paul) saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there. And she constrained us.*

Such is the simple and instructive narrative. The first reflection to which it will give rise, respects the remarkable expression used in the text. *Whose heart the Lord opened.* And does the heart remain shut against religious impressions until the Lord opens it? Is it of no use that we attend the means of grace, read God's word, and hear it read and explained, until by some influx of his Spirit he is pleased to make these means conducive to our improvement? Does it follow that the hearers of his word, if He refuses to open the heart, hear as if they heard not, and never come either to an acknowledgment of the truth, or to the receiving of it to a saving purpose. I put these questions, my brethren, in this manner, because I suspect that many cavilling hearers and superficial objectors are very much disposed thus to

put them. And yet the doctrine which they would thus gainsay is undeniably the Scriptural doctrine ; and the awful consequences to which it leads are too often exemplified by instances of daily occurrence, not to make us anxious to obtain right notions on the subject. Perhaps no inquiry is more serious and awakening ; nor is there one which calls for the most humble and devout use of the powers of our minds, with prayer to God for his blessing, more strongly than in what way we may derive spiritual benefit from the hearing of the divine word.

I begin with stating that, without divine grace, the heart remains insensible to the most alarming denunciations, as well as to the most consoling disclosures of Scripture. St. Paul's prayer for his Ephesian converts was this, "*that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the*

saints ¹.” Surely this text of Scripture is itself decisive on the subject. If St. Paul prays that the understanding of his converts may be enlightened, and their hearts become thus deeply impressed with the saving truths of the Gospel, it is a proof that he believed in God’s grace as the source of such spiritual benefits. When our Lord says, “*Take heed how ye hear, for whosoever hath to him shall be GIVEN* ² ;” is not this a proof, that improvement by hearing is derived from God, and given by him? “*If any of you lack wisdom,*” says St. James, “*let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not ; and it shall be given him* ³ .” The wisdom here meant is religious wisdom, the only true wisdom in scriptural estimation. We read in St. Luke’s Gospel, that, on a particular occasion in our Lord’s ministry, when it happened that there was a great attendance of Pharisees and Doctors of the law, to hear our divine Teacher, *the power of the*

¹ Eph. i. 17, 18. ² St. Luke viii. 18.

³ St. James i. 5.

Lord was present to heal them ¹. This power was that of divine grace, ready to pour knowledge on their understandings, and conviction into their consciences. In the Acts of the Apostles we read that Apollos, in consequence of his mightiness in the Scriptures, *helped them much which had believed through grace* ². The only construction to be put on this passage is, that Divine grace had wrought conviction in many minds, and that the conviction thus received had been strengthened by the Scriptures brought forward by Apollos, to prove the reality of our Lord's claims to be the Messiah. Read the Apostolic epistles for the purpose of ascertaining the truth of the doctrine for which I am contending, and you will find throughout a manifest reference to the power of divine grace in bringing home to the understanding, as well as to the heart, the revelations of the word of God. *This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord*, (St. Paul quotes this passage from

¹ St. Luke v. 17.

² Acts xviii. 27.

the prophecies of Jeremiah,) *I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them* ¹. What is this but an acknowledgment that the acquiescence of the heart in God's written law, is a gift of the Spirit? *The word of God*, says St. Paul to the Hebrews, *is quick and powerful, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart* ². Such spiritual effects must proceed from the Spirit of God, who goes along with the word read and preached. After this enumeration of so many passages of Scripture, let us rest on the case of Lydia, *whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended to the things spoken by Paul*. Here we have an instance of the effect, which the other passages of Scripture attribute to the Spirit as the cause. The cordial attention given by Lydia to St. Paul's preaching was from the Lord. Can we then hesitate to believe, that to a profitable hearing of the divine word the power of divine grace is indispensable? In

¹ Heb. x. 16 and viii. 10; Jer. xxxi. 33.

² Heb. iv. 12.

this sense the Apostolic declaration holds good, and the acknowledgment, that all the means of grace are instruments only in the divine hands, is proved by fact and experience. *Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man. I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth : but God that giveth the increase*¹. It is therefore manifest, that, without the grace of the Spirit operating on your understanding and affections, you can derive no spiritual benefit from the hearing of sermons. Your curiosity may be awakened, your minds interested, your attention gained : but divine grace is required to win the heart, and subdue it to the authority of the revealed law. Without this powerful application of heavenly influence, the ministers of the Gospel are no more to you than *sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal*. Without this watering of the dew of heavenly blessings, the planting

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 5, 6.

of the word yields no increase. Unless the Lord opens the heart to attend to the things spoken, the beautiful but solemn expostulation of Ezekiel is applicable to the most consummate orator that ever addressed a Christian congregation. “*Lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear thy words, but they do them not*”¹.

It now becomes a serious inquiry whether this opening of the heart, which we acknowledge to be of the Lord, be altogether independent of ourselves; whether it be or be not an act of sovereign grace, owing entirely to the will and appointment of God, and made to depend on no choice or exertion of our own. I think that the history before us will go far to the settling of this point. Previous to St. Paul’s visit to Philippi, Lydia had been drawn from the errors of paganism to the worship of the true God. Now, in order to have been thus converted to the Jewish faith, she

¹ Ezek. xxxiii. 32.

must have applied her time and thoughts to the subject of religion. She must have been superior to the prejudices of education, and to all the wrong impressions which her previous habits of life were calculated to make on her. She must have thought for herself. She must have read and inquired. And have we not a right to presume that she must also have abounded in prayer? The turn which she took indicated a thoughtful and inquiring character; it did more; it betokened piety—sincere, powerful, influential piety. Nothing but a strong sense of duty wrought on her mind by God's blessing on firmness, perseverance, and diligent attendance on outward means, could have produced, under God, such a predominant taste for public worship and devotional exercises. And observe, my brethren, the effect of such a habit wrought into the soul by the divine blessing on her own exertions. As soon as the Apostle preached at Philippi, Lydia was one of his hearers. Is not this a proof that she willingly sought the means of improving herself? And her conversion to

the Jewish church from the false religion of her fathers, was an instance of that sincerity and openness to conviction and docility of mind, which, as we learn from other passages of Scripture, God will always bless with increasing blessings. When our Lord says, "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have¹," we may conclude, that every person, diligently using every opportunity of improvement, and endeavouring to improve thereby, shall obtain the divine blessing on all his advances to perfection. What occasioned our Lord, after working a signal miracle, to quit immediately the city where the miracle was wrought? *They besought him that he would depart out of their coasts*². What teaching could have operated on minds thus hardened against instruction? Why did Paul condemn the unbelieving Jews as unworthy of eternal life? It was because he found them contradicting and

¹ St. Luke viii. 18.² St. Matt. viii. 34.

blaspheming. Why did he depart in such haste from Athens? Because he found its philosophers, some mocking and others putting off their own convictions with the fashionable excuse, we will hear thee again of this matter. Why did he remain eighteen months at Corinth? Because the all-seeing Searcher of hearts saw there much people willing to receive the word of God. "I have much people in this city," was the reason assigned to St. Paul by the Lord in a vision of the night¹. On the other hand, the offer of salvation to the unbelieving Jews in every city which the Apostle visited, when he went to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, proves that they might have accepted it if they would; else the offer would have been a mockery. But according to our Lord's own pathetic expostulation, they would not come unto him that they might have life². We must therefore conclude, that notwithstanding the indispensable necessity of divine grace to a profitable receiving of the divine word

¹ Acts xviii. 10.

² St. John v. 40.

into the heart, the fault is our own, if we do not receive it to our final salvation. If the heart be intent on the world, such as Lydia's was not; if it be engrossed with worldly passions and carnal desires, such as were those of the unbelieving Jews; if it be puffed up with philosophic pride, and with disdain of others, as was the heart of the Stoics at Athens, or carried away by a love of pleasure and fashionable libertinism, as was that of the Epicureans of the same city; it is a heart which loves to be closed against offending truths. Our Lord's command and promise are couched in general terms, when he says, "Ask, and it shall be given you; . . . every one that asketh receiveth. . . . If ye being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him¹." "If any of you lack wisdom," says St. James, "let him ask of God." But remember, the Apostle adds, "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering²." And again: "Ye ask,

¹ St. Matt. vii. 7, 8, and 11. ² St. James i. 6.

and receive not, because ye ask amiss¹.” And he goes on with a vehement reproof, calculated to show that it is worldly-mindedness, which shuts the heart against the grace of God. It is pride which blocks up the avenues of that heart; it is a withdrawing ourselves from God, which makes Him withdraw himself from us. I am entitled to draw these inferences from the following appeal, which the Apostle makes to his readers. *Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the Scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Envy forms no part of the divine character. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh unto God, and he will draw nigh to you².*

¹ St. James iv. 3.² St. James iv. 4—8.

Be not therefore surprized, my brethren, if many of the hearers of God's awakening word be still found to slumber in their sins. Be not surprized at the practical unbelief prevailing among us, notwithstanding the general desire of hearing the word preached. In short, be not surprized that God opens not the heart of many a hearer. It is through our own fault. St. James has plainly described the character of such as hear, but do not spiritually understand, and therefore remain unconverted. It is your worldly-mindedness, which shuts all avenues to your hearts. It is the force of prevailing sins, which stifles the convictions of conscience. It is pride, which resists the grace of God. It is the natural alienation of the heart from God, yielded to by yourselves, and not counteracted by continued watchfulness over yourselves, which draws you away from God. It is your unwillingness to pray from your hearts, which makes your formal, lifeless offerings an unacceptable sacrifice to God. Can you wonder that God's piercing word finds no opening into your hearts, when vice and worldly-minded-

ness, and sinful habits have made them, in prophetic language, "as an adamant stone, harder than flint ¹?" Can you wonder that the awful threatenings of the Gospel make no impression, when, instead of cherishing the alarms of conscience, you check the rising convictions, and turn the tide of your inward emotions into any other channel but that of self-condemnation? But I am persuaded better things of you, my brethren, though I thus speak. I am persuaded that you will "suffer the word of exhortation." Oh that the hearts of all among us may be opened by divine grace, to attend to the things which belong to our everlasting peace! Pray for God's grace to bring home conviction to your hearts. Never stifle the rising alarm for yourselves. Welcome it as the harbinger of salvation to your souls. Let it stir you up to that heart-searching prayer, which draws out all our omissions or violations of duty before the God of our spirits, and sues for reconciliation with him through the Lord Jesus

¹ Ezek. iii. 9.

Christ. Entangle not yourselves in so many cares and perplexities, as distract the heart and draw it away from God. Take every opportunity of communing with yourselves, and of finding out your prevailing defects. Remember the deceitfulness of the heart. Remember that *all the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes, but the Lord weigheth the spirits*¹. Oh then let it be not only the prayer of your lips, but the deep-felt confession of your hearts, when you thus pour out yourselves to the Almighty Searcher of them. *Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart. Prove me, and examine my thoughts. Look well if there be any way of wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting*². *Cleanse thou me from my secret faults. Keep thy servant also from presumptuous sins, lest they get the dominion over me. So shall I be undefiled, and innocent from the great offence*³.

There are two remarks in conclusion,

¹ Prov. xvi. 2. ² Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

³ Ps. xix. 12, 13.

which I hope that I may be able to press on your notice without trespassing too long on your time.

1. The person whose character we have considered was not only a mistress of a family, but was also engaged in a lucrative trade. These were, however, no impediments to her attendance on all the outward means of grace, nor did they prevent her from cultivating spiritual religion. Plead not therefore your unavoidable avocations in excuse for your neglect of public worship, of family prayer, of the great but too often forgotten duty of searching the Scriptures. Remember that in the same enumeration of Christian duties in which St. Paul mentions that we should not be *slothful in business*, he recommends his converts to be *fervent in spirit*. That ardour and eagerness, which you are so apt to carry to excess in worldly matters, Oh let them be transplanted into religion. Be only as careful and troubled in the affairs of your souls, as you are accustomed to be in respect to worldly cares and worldly savings, and you will be among those

whose hearts the Lord opens, to attend to the things which accompany salvation.

Lastly. Observe the effects of Lydia's conversion to the Christian faith, in the kindness of her conduct towards others. Let it read a lesson to all true Christians to love and assist each other. Let that love of God which is shed abroad in the believer's heart by the Holy Ghost, prompt you to every kindly feeling and affectionate act toward each other. Selfishness forms no part of the Christian character. To be *lovers of their own selves* is one of the marks which distinguish the apostasy of the last times. *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh* : and when the heart overflows with love to God and charity to man, the character will be that of genuine, unostentatious benevolence. *Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering ; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any : even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And*

*above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness : and let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also ye are called in one body*¹.

¹ Col. iii. 12—15.

SERMON V.

GALLIO, THE EXAMPLE OF INDIFFERENCE AND UNCONCERN ABOUT RELIGION.

Acts xviii. 17.

“ And Gallio cared for none of those things.”

WE have in this passage of Holy Scripture an example set before us, which it will be both our duty, and our happiness, most carefully to consider. It is an example not to imitate, but to shun. It is an example proposed for our warning, and held out to us by the light of God's holy word, that we may endeavour to escape from that state of the heart and its affections, which leads too many to treat with utter indifference the spiritual things of the Gospel. It is the example of a man, high in rank,

and remarkable, as the heathen historians inform us, for learning, integrity, probity, and good temper, qualities in great estimation with an irreligious and careless world; but dead to God, absorbed in the cares and duties of earth, acting as if he had no soul either to be saved or to perish, and no heaven or hell for its everlasting abode. What a striking instance of the truth of that doctrine, which holds so prominent a place in the Christian system,—the depravity and corruption of our nature! This depravity is not confined to the low in rank, to the poor in fortune, and the untutored in knowledge. It is the *fault and corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam*¹. It is felt in the most learned, the best educated, and the most nobly born. It disposes men, from the greatest to the least, to all kinds of depravity; and never can it be counteracted in its downward tendency to moral and eternal ruin, until, renewed in the spirit of our minds and

¹ Ninth Article.

taught of God, we put on the new man, become new creatures in Christ Jesus, and are created again by the Holy Spirit unto righteousness and true holiness. This in-born depravity, which only the Spirit of God can finally subdue, was felt in Solomon, the wisest of the sons of men, when it made him, who loved God in his youth, so reckless a sensualist in his advanced age. It was felt, in all its depth of unholy indifference, by Gallio, nobly born, respectably connected, and liberally educated ; it was felt by Felix, another Roman magistrate, when he stifled the convictions of conscience, and persisted in his career of unrighteousness and debauchery. It was felt by Agrippa, a king, a learned man, a just man and with an understanding capable of appreciating the value of truth, though it came to his ears from the lips of an humble prisoner, charged with the most serious offence against the state, and standing in chains before him. What are all these instances, my brethren, but proofs that no human power, no earthly advantages, no natural gifts can rescue us from

sin and folly, from recklessness to our eternal condition, and from everlasting misery? It is the Gospel of Christ alone, which is the power of God unto salvation: it is the Spirit of Christ alone which can open our blind eyes, soften our hard hearts, and translate us from the power of Satan, into the kingdom of God. Tell me not of the privileges of baptism: boast not of your being members of this Church or of that Church. The Jews, who crucified our Lord, had their vain-glorious themes of boasting. *We have Abraham to our father*¹, said they. They boasted in their law. *The people who knoweth not the law, said they, are accursed*². They went about to establish their own righteousness. The mere rite of circumcision, though it were only outward in the flesh, was in their estimation the seal of salvation, and the door to the kingdom of heaven. Far be it from me to depreciate the value of baptism, when duly received, and through the Spirit placing us in a state of grace, and of covenant with God. Far

¹ St. Luke iii. 8.

² St. John vii. 49.

be it from me to undervalue any one of the outward means of salvation, so plentifully afforded us in the Church of Christ. But let God be true. It is his Spirit alone which leads the mind to truth, and forms the heart to holiness. And had the Gallios, and Felixes, and Agrippas sought that Spirit and been led by that Spirit, they would have received with meekness the engrafted word; they would have felt his illumination in their understandings, and his sanctification in their hearts; and instead of being warnings to us to shun, and beacons set on high for us to avoid, they would have been among the holy band, "who through faith wrought righteousness¹," and through the same faith, sought in all the meekness of true wisdom, *the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*².

In considering this present subject, let me first turn your attention, with the divine blessing, to the three ways in which the

¹ Heb. xi. 33.

² Heb. xi. 10.

indifference of Gallio to all religion manifested itself.

1st. He was a man of learning and education ; he mixed much with the world, and lived in an inquiring age. The sacred volume, as far as respects the books of the Old Testament, was then well known to him as to its existence, but, as we find in this instance, imperfectly known, if not altogether unknown, as to its contents. He speaks of the Jewish religion as a question of words, and of names, and of their law, understanding that law as merely a code of civil obligations ; and in this way he dismisses the whole matter from his attention. And yet, contemptuously as he thought and spake, it was of God's revelation to his poor, sinful creatures, that he thus thought and spake. Something of Christian doctrine must also have reached his ears. It is impossible, that it could be otherwise. All, however, was treated by him with sovereign contempt.

And in what way do professing Christians, who care for none of those things, treat the holy volume, which contains the

acknowledged word of God? Does it form a part of their daily pious and careful reading? Do they study it in such a way, with such prayer to God, with such seeking after the teaching of his Spirit, that, when we preach Christ to them out of it, they feel his Gospel to be a comfort and a guide to them, *the savour of life unto life*¹? Are they never guilty of speaking contemptuously of it, and of treating it with supreme indifference? They hear of Christ, as of a name; attaching no love, no reverence, no heart-controuling trust to that "name, which is above every name"²;—the name of Jesus, that name to which all things in heaven and earth do bow, and which the true believer welcomes to his heart as the name of his only Lord and Saviour. They hear of justification through that name, whereby the sinner, accepting Christ with his whole heart, stands righteous before a holy God. This they would esteem a question of words. It enters not into their thoughts, nor does it subdue their

¹ 2 Cor. ii. 16.² Philip. ii. 10.

hearts to repentance toward God, and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ, and the hope of glory through his precious name. They hear of the Holy Spirit, and of his office in the salvation of the sinner, when he turns us from the love of the world, and of sin, to the love of God and of holiness. This is a question in which they are altogether uninterested. They hear of a holy and spiritual law, which the Spirit of Christ writes on the hearts of his people, by means of the Gospel of Christ. The holy requirements of this law are with them like the Jewish law in Gallio's estimation. *I will be no judge of such matters*¹, said he; and provided they can pass creditably, successfully, and prosperously, through the world; provided they love, that is, are on friendly terms with their own, and their own love them, the Gallios of our days care neither for the Gospel, nor for Gospel laws. They will not pretend to judge of spiritual matters, which their carnal and unsanctified minds cannot discern.

¹ Acts xviii. 15.

2. Gallio seems to have entertained a great respect for the temporal peace of society; and if the law of man had been broken, he would perhaps have stood forth, in all the sternness of Roman discipline, as the avenger of the violated human law. But with respect to the law of God, he felt towards that law a supreme contempt. And are there no professed Christians, who call themselves Christians, and yet greatly resemble, in this respect, this unblushing heathen governor? When the thief violates the law of man, when the murderer breaks the same law, (though God has in mercy prohibited these crimes himself, but the divine prohibition is not the restraining motive on the one hand, nor the cause of condemnation on the other), when the peace of society is invaded by the violent, and its outward decencies are set at nought by the notoriously profligate and immoral, then the cry is, Reason would that the penalty incurred should be borne, and the law of man guarded thereby from the slightest infraction. But how do the Gallios of our

days feel towards the violators of the Divine commandments? Take the sabbath-breaker for instance. Suppose that he breaks no human law by his conduct. He violates the sanctity of the divine law, however, in his own house, among his servants, and his clerks, in his domestic and mercantile establishment. These violations of God's holy day are known and observed. But are sinners like these, sinners against a holy God, are they shunned and avoided? Do we so treat them as to show that we will not, by our outward respect, and homage, and intimacy, be partakers with them in their sins? Do we take advantage of the influence, which friendship and near connection give us, in order to expostulate with them for the errors of their moral judgment, for their grievous faults in practice, and for the scandal which they bring on the Christian name? We look with horror, and perhaps with unchristian contempt, on them who disgrace themselves by violating the law of man in fraud, in dishonesty, in dishonourable and unjust proceedings. But which of us is so jealous

for the Lord our God as to shrink from any friendly intercourse with them who are living in open disobedience to the commandments of our God and Saviour? Great and laudable, and praiseworthy, are the efforts made for advancing the temporal peace of our community, and for guarding it against the encroachments of the vulgar, the undisciplined, and the ungovernable! Are our efforts equally directed, and carried on with equal zeal, towards the advancement of the Christian faith, the exciting of religious feelings, the spreading and the establishing of the fear and the love of God our Saviour? How does our example bear on this duty? Can no man plead our evil ways as an encouragement for his? Can no one say that we behave, either at home or abroad, as if the Lord was not with us, and therefore others can have the same right to be disobedient to God that we have, provided the law of man can lay no hold upon them?

3. "The Greeks," that is, the Hellenistic Jews, "took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the

judgment-seat¹." This had no effect on Gallio. It disturbed not the tranquillity of his unalterable indifference. But we must search a little more deeply into such conduct, and into so open a breach even of human laws. We find St. Paul, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, (and Gallio was the Proconsul, or Governor of Corinth,) associating Sosthenes with himself in addressing the letter to that Church. *Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ, through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, unto the Church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus*². It would therefore appear that Sosthenes, who had been the chief ruler of the Jewish synagogue, had been converted to the Christian faith. And this Christian convert, because he was a Christian, was permitted to be thus publicly beaten in the presence of the Roman magistrate, and before his judgment-seat, while that magistrate contemplated such proceedings with utter unconcern. For it was this very con-

¹ Acts xviii. 17.

² 1 Cor. i. 1, 2.

duct, which drew down from the inspired historian the strong though implied invective contained in the text. *And Gallio cared for none of those things.* Thus, brethren, you see the fatal effects of this irreligious indifference in its influence on our behaviour towards man as well as towards God. The persecution of a Christian on account of his Christian principles is connived at, and suffered to go unpunished, because he who administered the laws was not only no Christian, but manifested a supreme contempt towards all religion, as well as towards its professors.

And is not the conduct of them who make an outward profession of the Gospel, but whose profession of it is altogether heartless and insincere, is not their conduct similar to that of Gallio, both in its principles and in its effects? How often does the heartless Christian look down with contempt on the sincere and pious follower of Christ! How often is he tempted to throw discouragements in the way of so decided a Christian, and to injure him in his trade and profession, and if he cannot

work so much mischief, injure him at least in his good name! How often does he throw out insinuations to the disadvantage of such a Christian, and hinder him in his course of usefulness! Our Lord says, "The world will love its own," and addressing himself to his true followers, he tells them, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you ¹." The expression—*the world*—means the heartless followers of Christ, as well as the heathen world. It means them who bear the name, but have not the spirit of Christ. And whom does such a world of merely professing Christians love, and honour, and favour, and advance? Assuredly those who are like it. Whom does it oppose, on whom does it bestow its contempt and pour forth its names of abuse? On those, whose principles and whose practices have placed them in an entire separation from it, and from its evil ways. So that the

¹ St. John xv. 19.

heartless professor of the Gospel ; he who cares not for Christ nor for his laws, he will always be, more or less, a persecutor. In being so, he will break no human law ; he will sin under the protection of law. The true Christian must expect no favours from him ; no helping hand in his endeavours to rise in the world ; no real and scarcely any pretended respect. Rather he must expect the ill usage which the law cannot punish ; the slight, the contempt, the sneer, the bitter jest, and yet more bitter calumny.

We have thus considered the usual effects of irreligious indifference, as manifested in cases resembling that of Gallio.

Let us now turn to the causes of the evil. When we know the causes, be they proximate or remote, of a disease, we are able to meet it with the suitable remedy.

1. The first cause is that to which I have already alluded ; the depravity of the human heart by nature, our inborn and inbred corruption. And one feature of this innate depravity, and that feature the darkest, is the alienation of the heart from God. *The*

*carnal mind is enmity against God*¹. The unregenerate and unrenewed man “likes not to retain God in his knowledge².” He is alienated from the life of God, and is past feeling. Judge then, whether this natural depravity being not removed by the grace of God, will not produce an utter unconcern towards every thing that relates to God. And religion consisting in the love and service of God, must be indifferent at least, if not distasteful, to him who has not been regenerated by the Spirit, born anew to a spiritual life, and taught by the same Spirit both to know and to love God.

2. This is the main cause of the unconverted heart's indifference to God. But there are helping causes; and this original depravity is increased by other and very powerful means. The love of the world; the devotedness to its business or its pleasures; the having the heart absorbed in the love of gain; the irreligious company which we keep; the example of men who do not care about religion, and with whom

¹ Rom. viii. 7.

² Ibid. i. 28.

we associate, and whose maxims we imbibe; these will increase our moral disease, and sink us into the deepest and most awful irreligion.

3. Another cause is our inattention to our own hearts; our resting satisfied with the performance of outward duties, and with the mere form of religion, while our heart is uninterested in its services. How few search and try their ways! How many pass day after day without self-examination! How many are deficient in prayer and watchfulness! How many think only of their worldly business, and can spare no leisure for God and Christ and spiritual things! How many are tainted with a secret unbelief, and give no credit either to divine threatenings or to divine promises! How many love the honour which cometh from men, and seek not that which cometh from God only! How many love the praise of men more than the praise of God; and are in short so taken up with all that is in the world, with the lust of the flesh, with the lust of the eye, and with the pride of life, that no love of the Father

is in their hearts, and no regard to God in all their thoughts !

Lastly. You know the disease. We have searched into its remote and its proximate causes. The mirror of God's Word has discovered us to ourselves as we are by nature, and shown the unregenerate heart to be one mass of spiritual deformity.

Brethren. Are you anxious to escape from a state, which must make us in this world irreligious and unholy, and in the next decidedly and hopelessly miserable ? Are you willing that the faith of Christ should be a matter wherein your hearts should be deeply interested ? Are you willing that your love, and all your feelings of admiration and confidence should be directed to the Father who made you, to the Son who redeemed you, to the Holy Ghost who sanctifies all the elect people of God ? Do you desire that your hearts should burn within you, until they catch that sacred flame, which glowed with such fervour in the saints of old, even until they counted their life to be Christ, because that life was entirely spent in his service, and to his

glory ; and their death to be gain, because that death would translate them into his beatific presence ¹? Go to the bottom of the evil. Attack the disease in its deeply seated abode. Lay the axe to the root of all your natural corruption. Go, seek the Spirit of God and of Christ, that the eyes of your understanding may be opened. Go, seek the transforming power of the Spirit, that under its influence you may be inwardly and entirely changed by the renewing of your mind. Embrace the truth as it is in Jesus ; that truth which enjoins the follower of Jesus to “ put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and to put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness ².” Remember that when such is your object, much must be borne, and much must be forborne. Your ardour

¹ Phil. i. 21. To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

² Ephes. iv. 22—24.

in the pursuits of this world shows that you can be eager, animated, and industrious. Display the same ardour in the concerns of your eternal welfare. The Apostle enjoins us to watch unto prayer, to be persevering in it, and to guard against all indifference towards it. Lay the state of your souls before the mercy-seat, where dwells in glory unapproachable, the Intercessor for his people. Plead a Saviour's intercession with your heavenly Father, that he would breathe upon the dry bones of your affections, and that at his breathing they may live¹. Oh that the habits of your lives could but be favourable to your growth in grace, and in all liveliness of religious feeling. We place our happiness too much in the things of this life. Seek to be spiritually minded. Esteem it your duty to devote a portion of your leisure to scriptural reading. The reading of devotional books will be profitable to your soul's improvement. Be diligent in attending the public ordinances of the Church, and labour

¹ Ezek. xxxvii. 1—11.

to obtain a spiritualizing interest in them. Remember that it is not a lip-service, it is the heart service which God regards. Let the sabbath be given up to religious exercises throughout.

I know that I am recommending difficult duties. I know that flesh and blood will revolt against this course of self-denying, and soul-elevating discipline. But believe me, what I recommend is indispensably necessary for you. You see the danger of being unconcerned and indifferent about religion. And you cannot tell to what depths of hardness, blindness, and insensibility, the heart of man will sink, unless we strive to our power, and even beyond our power, in seeking to know, and love, and follow the Lord fully. Remember that your heavenly Father will help you, and that the Spirit, who proceeds from him and from the Son, will guide you, and will fill you with all joy and peace in believing. But let me entreat you, brethren, nay, implore and beseech you, on closing this appeal to you, not to be cold-hearted in a matter of such immense concern.

What! heaven, the glory of the Eternal God, to be offered to you, and you to be as indifferent to it, as if it were a prize of no value. Awake, ye that thus sleep; arise from this deadness of internal feeling; and Christ, who is the image of the Invisible God, will lead you by the light of his unerring word from grace to glory.

SERMON VI.

ON PRAYER.

EPHESIANS vi. 18, 19.

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance, and supplication for all saints ; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the Gospel.”

ST. PAUL had just finished the beautiful description of the Christian's armour, when he wrote the passage contained in the text. That description has been read to you in the epistle for the day¹; and when due regard is had to the customs and notions of ancient days, it will impress upon every

¹ Preached on the 21st Sunday after Trinity.

reader of the account, his Christian duty in respect to the trials and temptations which must constantly assail us in our Christian warfare. Our progress through life ; the maintaining of our faith and corresponding duties in a dangerous and evil world, is in Scripture considered as a warfare. A hard battle it is to the Christian ; and the harder it seems to us, in proportion to the strictness of our notions respecting our duties as Christians. The light-minded and frivolous always view the obligations incumbent on them in a manner very different from that in which the true Christian considers them. They have not, nor can they have, that standard of purity by which the children of God would weigh every motive, word, and action. Some would make custom their rule of acting ; some would be satisfied if the world does not condemn them ; some seek honour from men, and if that honour be obtained, they are careless whether the laws of God be broken or not. The Apostle, in his exalted notions of Christian duty, felt the difficulty which the Christian would meet with in living up

entirely to it. He knew the spirituality and extent of the law of the Gospel, and the various enemies which oppose us in our efforts to obey it. He saw with the eye of faith a host of enemies unknown to the natural man ; and he would guard us not only against the natural appetites which war against the soul, but also against the spiritual adversaries, *the principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world*, who are leagued against our spiritual peace and eternal safety. The armour which he bids the Christian soldier to provide, is described in language borrowed from the military usages of his day ; but, divested of the figurative clothing which he gives it, it is no other than the knowledge of the truth derived from the Gospel, an unaccusing conscience, faith in Christ, and the holy word of God. These are the required implements for our spiritual warfare ; these are our weapons ; and were we always equipped with them, and faithfully disposed to use them for our defence, (for a defensive armour they form,) we should not be so often defeated in our

spiritual conflict, nor find it so difficult, as alas ! we often do, to stand in the evil day. Right principles, fixed stedfastly in the heart through a practical and saving knowledge of the Scriptures, a conscience void of offence towards God and man, a faith in Christ and in his precious sacrifice for sin, and that holy word, from which the spiritual combatant draws all his weapons, would indeed make us able to endure hardness, whether it be the difficulties of duty, or the oppositions of temptation, as good soldiers of Christ Jesus.

The description is finished and crowned by the exhortation of the text. Prayer ; prayer from the heart, and under the leading of the Holy Spirit ; prayer continued, fervent, and persevering ; prayer such as this, so unwearied, so deep, and so earnest, leaves nothing wanting for completing our defence, and qualifying us to “ be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”

Painful is it to consider the objections which the merely natural man makes to prayer ; painful it is even to read the

arguments on which some would venture to support this Christian privilege of communion with God. What ! says a cavilling objector, tell an all-knowing Being our wants ; try by our prayers to change the decrees which have gone out from an unchangeable Being ? You do not tell him your wants, says the answerer of the objection, himself as little of a spiritual man as the other ; you only let him know that you are sensible of your wants. You do not attempt to change his unchangeable commands, the order of his fixed and unalterable proceedings. The change is wrought in yourselves ; and therefore, if any change takes place in his decrees, it is only from the change which has taken place in your affections towards him. Such objections, and such answers, show the source from which they spring. The objections will never hurt a Christian's faith ; nor will the answers ever satisfy a Christian's pious mind. He takes his stand on higher views than your man of reason and philosophy. He takes it on the revelation of Jesus Christ. When our blessed Lord in-

culcated the duty of prayer in his Sermon on the Mount, his reasoning was derived from the well-known relation between a father and his offspring. “ *What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? or, if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him* ¹ ?” Here is an illustration level to all capacities; an analogy which the uninstructed can understand, and the most learned of the children of men cannot gainsay nor resist. When the learned are puzzling themselves and others with theories on the duty and efficacy of prayer, the Christian sits undisturbed and unmoved in his faith, satisfied that he has in heaven a Father, and through an atoning Saviour, a reconciled Father. Accordingly, when our Lord’s disciples, knowing that prayer was a duty and a privilege, asked to be taught how to pray, the answer was, “ *After*

¹ St. Matt. vii. 9, 10, 11.

*this manner pray ye : Our Father, which art in heaven*¹." Let your faith be the saving faith through which God is reconciled to you ; let that faith be the instrument by which Christ is formed within you, and through which he is in you "the hope of glory ;" let that power of the Holy Ghost, which renews the believer after the image of his Saviour, transform you into new creatures, and make you a spiritual generation, "*born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever*"²," then you will feel the high ground on which you stand in relation to God, and in relation to that duty of prayer which the child of God owes to his Father in heaven. All objections vanish beneath these transporting assurances ; the answers of the man of reason appear foolish and vain to him who is taught of God, and who speaks of the things pertaining to God in words which the Spirit of God himself has taught. "*I say not unto you,*" were our Lord's words

¹ St. Matt. vi. 9.² 1 Pet. i. 23.

to men who had left all to follow him, “ *I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you ; for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God*¹. ” Resemble these first followers of your Lord in their attachment to a Master, whom if they had been altogether of a worldly spirit, they would not have followed through his temptations ; resemble them in their attachment, and you will feel the comfort of knowing to whom and through whom you pray. The Apostles, gifted with his Spirit, were well instructed in the duty of prayer. See them on their knees, when the world was arrayed against them in all its power, and in all its willingness to hurt them. *And now, Lord, behold their threatenings : and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus*². Did they in the fulness of love and holy communion with their

¹ St. John xvi. 26, 27.

² Acts iv. 29, 30.

God, did they think that it was absurd and needless to make their wants known to an omniscient God? Did they oppose to the full tide of holy affections, the cold and worldly hindrances of a false and captious philosophy? They knew that their God was "without variableness or shadow of turning," and therefore reposed themselves with unshaken confidence on an unchangeable Father. See a murderous tyrant slaying one Apostle, and imprisoning another. For the imprisoned Apostle "prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God." And the prayer was heard¹. It was when Paul and Silas, in the darkness of a prison, and with their feet confined in chains, prayed and sang praises to God, that by an earthquake they were released from confinement, and even their jailor made to confess the power of God in his prisoners². These, it may be said, were extraordinary interpositions; all this was miraculous, and not within the ordinary course of nature. I grant that it was

¹ Acts xii. 1—13.

² Acts xvi. 24—31.

miraculous ; but it is also written for our learning, that “ we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope ;” hope in an ever present and ever merciful Father, that He, who has wrought such wonders by an extraordinary providence, would, in the ways and methods of his ordinary proceedings, be still able and willing to be our light and our shield, our rock and our defence, our buckler and our refuge. “ *In my trouble,*” said the pious, suffering saint of old, who expected no miraculous interposition for his preservation, “ *in my trouble I will call upon the Lord, and complain unto my God. So shall he hear my voice out of his holy temple ; and my complaint shall come before him, it shall enter even into his ears*¹.”

Consider again the manner in which the Apostles speak of the privileges of true believers ; and we must remember, that among these privileges prayer is the dearest, and holiest, and choicest gift of the Spirit. For it is in prayer that the Spirit

¹ Ps. xviii. 5, 6.

acts as the intercessor between God and us on earth, as the Son of God does in heaven. It is he who suggests the prayer which, for the sake of Christ, the Father accepts. *Ye have received the spirit of adoption*, says St. Paul, *whereby ye cry, Abba, Father*¹. In what a delightful state does a saving faith place the true Christian! Enrolled among the children of God, adopted into the family of God through that saving name of which the whole family in heaven and earth is named, he is entitled to address God as his Father. He commits himself unto God, as “unto a faithful Creator and most merciful Saviour,” humbly trusting that in all the changes and chances of the world, he is precious through Christ in a Father’s sight, and all his concerns safe in a Father’s hands. *Truly our fellowship*, says St. John, *is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ*². Here an actual communion is spoken of; an intimacy and a friendship wrought with the ruler of the Universe, through the

¹ Romans viii. 15.² 1 John i. 3.

mediation of the Son and the graces of the Spirit. Can a true Christian, under such circumstances, forbear to pour forth his soul in all its wants and humble petitions to his God? Would he be kept back from so delightful a communion by reasonings derived from the weak judgments of fallible man? Would he check the overflowings of filial confidence by the dark and uncertain conjectures of natural reason, or suffer shipwreck of his faith on the shoals and quicksands which an unbelieving and a sensual mind would raise around him? His language would rather be that of the great Apostle; *I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him*¹, whether it be the prayer which through his Spirit I offer, or the soul which, for his Son's sake, he saves, against that day in which I shall find that all things have worked together, through his abiding love and preserving providence, to my present and eternal good.

¹ 2 Timothy i. 12.

I have taken, my brethren, this brief and general Scriptural view of the duty and efficacy of Christian prayer, before I proceed to enter briefly, but more particularly, on the Apostle's injunction in respect to this most important Christian duty. His language is concise, but it is most strong and most important. Two points connected with his admonition deserve your especial consideration. *Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit*¹. St. Paul therefore would consider the natural man, distinguished from the regenerated Christian, as incapable of prayer. He knew that the heart is by nature at enmity with God, and is averse from such communion with him, not inclined to it. He knew, that until sinful man by accepting Christ with a saving faith believes unto righteousness, and enters into the family of God by adoption, he cannot call God his Father; that such an one entertains not those views of the Godhead which present Him to the Christian as his Creator, Re-

¹ Ephesians vi. 18.

deemer, and Sanctifier. "*We know not what we should pray for as we ought,*" says the same Apostle on another occasion ; "*but the Spirit helpeth our infirmities*¹." The transforming influence of the Holy Spirit changes the whole bent of our affections, and turns the heart entirely to God. The Spirit inspires the humble resignation, the meek surrendering of our will to the divine will, the carefulness after spiritual things, the comparative indifference to earthly ones, which fill the true Christian's heart in approaching to God by prayer. It is only by the Spirit that a man can say, *It is good for me to draw near unto God*².

Secondly. St. Paul also mentions another requisite, namely, that the Christian must be "watching thereunto with all perseverance;" watching, as the original word may be rendered, *for this very thing*. This direction is still founded on that same corruption of the human heart, to which I have already alluded, and to its natural enmity against God. This *infection*, we believe,

¹ Romans viii. 26. ² Psalm lxxiii. 28. Bib. Vers.

*remains even in the regenerated Christian*¹, and against this, he is required to use his watchfulness and circumspection, lest it should betray him, either into that carnal security which lives without God in the world, or into that worldly mindedness and carefulness about many things which distracts the thoughts, and draws away the disciple from instruction *at the feet of Jesus*, as well as from prayer to that throne of mercy, made accessible to the believer through the blood of Jesus.

Judge now, my brethren, how the Christian is qualified by prayer to pass through this world, as a sojourner should do, *using but not abusing it*. Like a soldier, he is equipped with his spiritual armour. Faith and the word of God are, it is true, the shield and the sword, with which he marches to his spiritual conflict. But prayer, like his guardian angel, is his constant and never-failing protector. Like the water, which quenches the thirst of the wearied warrior, this allays all his

¹ Art. 9.

earthly cravings. Like the principle of unconquerable fortitude and sustaining strength, which animates the soldier in the day of battle, this internal but supporting and upholding habit of the mind and heart, produces a readiness and an ability to meet every temptation and endure every difficulty in his Christian duty. This power is always at hand to make him willing in the time of need, and, as his day is, to cause that his strength shall be. Judge then of the fervour and elevation of true Christian piety, whether it be engaged in secret, or family, or congregational prayer. That piety, like the sacred fire in the Jewish temple, is always burning ; ready for the morning and evening sacrifice, prepared for every sacrifice and every offering. It shows itself in the frequent ejaculation, in the mental prayer, which is offered without words, in the regular and continued supplication. It will also show itself in one part of a Christian's duty, which, without any undue desire to magnify my office, I would impress most strongly on this congregation. All your Christian brethren,

all saints as St. Paul calls them, should be objects of your prayers and intercessions, and so should he, who stands in the interesting and solemn relation to you as your Minister. No Christian Minister, who values prayer as he ought, but must derive a heart-cheering consolation from knowing, that his people are mindful of him in their retired devotions; that they ask of God that wisdom for him, that strength, that zeal, that love, and why should you not add, that *utterance*, which may enable him to declare unto you the whole counsel of God; and, although your carnal hearts may reject it, enable him also to impart to you that spiritual admonition, which may point out to you the danger of your carelessness, worldly mindedness, carnal security and sinfulness, and thus through the Spirit of his God warn you in time to flee from the wrath to come. *And for me*, says St. Paul, (even an inspired Apostle has said it,) *that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the Gospel*¹.

¹ Eph. vi. 19.

I have thus taken a scriptural view of the duty and efficacy of prayer ; I have laid before you, on St. Paul's authority, the means of enabling you not only to abound in prayer, but also of praying as you ought. Permit me to remind you, in conclusion, my brethren, that thus to perform this Christian duty does indeed presuppose a sincere desire to increase and to abound in all the graces of the Christian life. It presupposes a saving faith and a sanctified heart. Should any one that hears me be inclined to say, " All this is too high for me. This is an elevation to which I cannot soar." Let me ask that hearer, what is it that thus keeps you down ? Is it covetousness which deadens your affections ? Is it worldly mindedness which has raised up a barrier against piety, and forbids your soul from mounting over it to the God and Father of your Lord Jesus Christ ? Or is it some prevailing fleshly lust, which more than any other propensity wars against the soul, paralyzes all its energies, keeps you a willing slave to its galling bondage, and will for ever, while it is

indulged, bar against you an access to the throne of grace here, and to the throne of glory hereafter. Or is it only a careless and frivolous turn of mind, which prevents all seriousness of thought, even in so solemn a concern as your intercourse by prayer with your Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. O my brethren, who are thus strangers to the joys of religion, and thus at enmity with the Ruler of the Universe, and the decider of your everlasting destination, awake at length from your dream of fancied security, from the sleep of sin and of death. *Awake*, says our Apostle, *and Christ shall give thee light*¹. The Sun of righteousness shall arise on you with healing on his wings; and the first illuminating ray which he casts on you, will show you to yourselves as spiritually *wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked*². Then you will welcome his voice and hear it with a willing concurrence: *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*³. *I am the way, and the truth,*

¹ Eph. v. 14.² Rev. iii. 17.³ St. Matt. xi. 28.

and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me ¹. *Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out* ². Come unto him with a saving faith, an unfeigned repentance, with hearts craving pardon, grace, and sanctification. Come to Christ, and through him seek access to your God. Pray from the bottom of your hearts for the power and the inclination to pray. Give up the careless habit. Abandon the pleasurable, the self-indulging, and the sinful life. May the Lord hear you in this your day of spiritual trouble. May the God of Jacob defend you in this deadly sickness of your souls. May He "send you help from His holy place, and evermore mightily defend you." May His powerful Spirit proclaim on this day the opening of the prison-house to you who have been kept so long fast bound in your sins. May He give you *the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness*. And oh! that you may at length *be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified* ³. Even so come in spirit and in power, Lord Jesus!

¹ St. John xiv. 6. ² John vi. 37. ³ Isaiah lxi. 3.

SERMON VII.

ON THE ISRAELITES TRAVELLING THROUGH
THE VALE OF MISERY TO SION.

PSALM lxxxiv. 5, 6, 7.

“Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee ; in whose heart are thy ways. Who going through the vale of misery use it for a well : and the pools are filled with water. They will go from strength to strength : and unto the God of gods appeareth every one of them in Sion.”

IF I were required to send a reader of the Scriptures to the book best calculated for exciting and cherishing devotional feelings, I should refer him to the book of Psalms. The writers of these pious and beautiful compositions, of whom David was the chief, were full of the love of God, and wrote and spake under the full inspiration of the Spirit of their God. Theirs was no sudden nor

transient feeling. Every event of life, every object in the natural world, and every seeming irregularity in the moral one brought them with a more intense feeling of piety to the God of their salvation. Whether, for instance, the Royal Psalmist mourned over his sad and painful delinquency, or, in the hope of God's reconciling mercy, tuned his harp to the sound of praise and thanksgiving,—both as a repenting and as a pardoned sinner,—he placed his only hope and his assured trust in the saving goodness and unmerited loving-kindness of a pardoning God. *I will cry unto God most high*, he exclaims, *unto God that performeth all things for me* ¹. Go therefore to this inspired book, O penitent and believing Christian, and learn from it the feelings and language with which it best becomes even thee, with the glorious discoveries of the Gospel within thy reach, to approach that Holy Being, who demands from thee the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart.

¹ Ps. lvii. 2. Bib. Vers.

The psalm, of which the text is a part, contains a beautiful description of pious Israelites journeying up from all parts of the holy land to the city of Jerusalem, in order to attend on some divine ordinance. The Psalmist represents the travellers in companies, whether of families or strangers, as passing through a dreary and uninhabited and unwatered country. Like Christians travelling heavenward, they meet with difficulties and privations. Joy is in their heart, but weeping, or causes for weeping, rise in their way. No well of water is found to quench their thirst; but, though the desert is sandy and the way barren, the water is not far from the surface, and with a little labour pours itself forth in pools for their refreshment. Thus sustained by an ever present and ever merciful providence, they pursue their toilsome journey, until, not wearied, but with fresh accessions of strength, they reach the holy city, and appear before their God at one of his most solemn festivals.

Such is the general purport of the words of the text. Many of the expressions used

will, I trust, afford us some salutary reflections, as I proceed to apply them to our mutual improvement and comfort.

Every text brought from the Old Testament before the attention of a Christian congregation, must be considered in connection with those views of God and of ourselves, which are derived from the Gospel. The glorious discoveries, which the Gospel has made, were seen but dimly and imperfectly even by the inspired saints of old ; and although these holy men of God were so overruled by the Spirit, as to express ideas, and to use language in accordance with such discoveries, yet their conceptions were necessarily inadequate, and their knowledge confined. God has provided better things for us Christians, that they without us should not be made perfect ¹. These are two views of sacred truth, of primary importance, and essential to the Gospel scheme, which I shall endeavour to make the groundwork both of the illustrations and of the spiritual application to

¹ Heb. xi. 40.

our own circumstances, with which the words of the text will furnish me.

Our Church is in agreement with all Scripture when she asserts in her articles that "we are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not by our own works or deservings¹." Every thing in religion depends on our right conceptions of ourselves both as we are by nature, and as we are designed to be made by grace. Justification by faith in Christ, and sanctification by the Spirit of Christ, are the leading doctrines of religion in respect to salvation. Let us consider them for a while, as preparatory to our application of the words of the text to them. We are in one sense justified in the present life. St. Paul's words are decisive on this point. He speaks of present justification. "Therefore being justified," he says, or as the words may be rendered *having, been justified*, "by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord

¹ Art. xi,

Jesus Christ ¹.” “Being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him ².” “To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness ³.” It is therefore evident that every sinner coming to Christ with a full assurance of faith, receives from God the pardon of his past sins. Great care and caution, however, my brethren, are necessary, lest this doctrine should be abused as an encouragement to sin. St. Paul himself feared such a perversion. “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein ⁴.” I can therefore easily conceive the case of a heathen for the first time made acquainted with Christ, and converted to the faith. On his saving faith, his past sins are all pardoned. He is justified before God. I can also conceive even a professing Christian, who has led a careless or an unholy life roused to repentance,

¹ Rom. v. 1.² Ibid. ix.³ Rom. iv. 5.⁴ Rom. vi. 1, 2.

circumspection, and fear. I can conceive even him coming to Christ with an utter renunciation of himself, and with earnest cries for pardon. Would you not pronounce of him also, that he is by faith justified before God? He is pardoned for the past, and has access by faith into the the grace wherein he stands. All however depends on the sincerity of the faith thus professed. If in either case it be insincere and heartless, it is an unsaving faith, and no pardon can be the result. But we will entertain better hopes of some serious Christians. They, we will trust, have felt the weight of past sins, their carelessness for instance, their indifference to God, their love of the world, their dislike to prayer, and to all communion with God. They, we will trust, have seen the danger of a sinful and immoral life, and seek with their hearts, what they have hitherto done with their lips only, salvation from Christ. Are not such believing Christians justified through the forbearance of God from the sins that are past? Yes, my brethren, they are: and whosoever thou art that hearest

me, and thus repentest and seekest pardon through Christ, thou art in this justified state ; born and having continued in sin, but released from the penalty through this faith in the atoning blood of Christ.

Now, however, follows, as connected intimately and most closely with the former, the doctrine of sanctification. Thy faith, we suppose, is a true and saving one. In that case thou abhorrest all sin, and seekest pardon for it, and an entire release not only from its penalty but its power. Having gained access by faith into this grace wherein thou standest, the first feeling is, rejoicing in hope of the glory of God¹. Such a saving faith places thee in a state to enjoy this delightful feeling. The most consoling views of God's mercy in Christ Jesus open on thee ; and a sense of reconciliation with him, brings with it that peace which passeth all understanding. It is now, my brethren, that the work of God's Spirit on the justified believer begins to display itself. In one thus pardoned and received to mercy,

¹ Rom. v. 2.

we see the effects of a lively hope, and of a renewing faith, in his every day conversation and habits. He feels it, not in a mere notional faith, not in enthusiastic fancies, nor in enraptured emotions ; he feels it in the change of his affections, the softening of his temper, the bent and tendency of his thoughts and desires to “the love of God and the patient waiting for Christ.” “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit¹.” Justified by faith, accepted through the beloved, and being sanctified through his Spirit, you are not sensible of the illapses of the Spirit on your souls ; you discover no outward manifestations, no rushing wind, no fiery appearances. But you will feel it thenceforward in the change produced in the inner man, in your thoughts, in your desires, in the prevailing tendency of your desires and intentions, in your increasing love for God, in the heavenly mindedness

¹ John iii. 8.

of your heart and all its affections. It will be seen in your charity for man, charity unbounded, without hypocrisy and without partiality. It will be seen in your humility, in a freedom from all desire of pre-eminence, from all vain-glorious and conceited thoughts of yourselves; it will be seen in an entire exemption from all suspicions, and jealousies, and eager panting after respect and deference from others, which are the sure tokens of a worldly and unsanctified heart. It will be seen, in short, in keeping under the body, not only its gross appetites, and bringing it into subjection. It will be seen in a humble spirit, serious manners, and a holy life. Blessed surely are they who are in this state of acceptance with God. The marks of the Holy Spirit are visible in them—visible, not in affected conversation, or in unnecessary singularities, or in highly wrought and enthusiastic feelings, but visible in the subjugation of the heart, and the right ordering of the life, in the spotless conduct, in the serious habits, in love to God, and charity to man.

Such, brethren, is the true Christian, such

the man, who, through faith in Christ, and under the influence of his Spirit, has made God his strength and the high God his Redeemer¹.

Let us now see whether the beautiful expressions of the text are not applicable to the true Christian, when happily he thus stands through faith in the grace of God. *Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee ; in whose heart are thy ways. Who going through the vale of misery use it for a well, and the pools are filled with water. They will go from strength to strength, and unto the God of gods appeareth every one of them in Sion.* The penitent Christian, reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, and through grace walking thenceforward in newness of life, is thus pardoned, and thus renewed only through divine strength. His assent to the law of God is not a mere assent of the understanding, or an acquiescence of the powers of his mind, in a truth made known to him. The ways of the Lord are in his heart, and with the heart

¹ Ps. lxxviii. 35.

he "believeth unto righteousness." What ! though like the Israelites of old travelling to an earthly tabernacle, he passes to an heavenly inheritance through a land of weeping. What ! though disappointments meet him at every step ; and sorrow of different kinds from time to time assail his faith. What ! though his prospects of comfort and prosperity are suddenly overclouded, and failures in business, the treachery of friends, and the unkindness of enemies be his portion ? Is there no well-spring of life opening itself to him, as water to the thirsty Israelite ? Never does the page of Scripture, our well of comfort, pour forth its consoling assurances with greater effect, than in a day of trouble and rebuke and blasphemy. *Thy statutes*, said the pious Psalmist, *have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage*¹. In the gloom of a prison and under the galling coercion of chains and fetters, Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises to God. Even at the stake, with the fire encompassing their bodies, the

¹ Ps. cxix. 54.

pious martyrs of old resorted to the rich treasury of God's word for comfort and support. And why? because their strength was in God, and in their hearts were his ways. Only be convinced on scriptural proofs, my afflicted fellow Christian, that God is in Christ reconciling Himself unto thee; that thou hast with faith embraced the reconciliation, and that the work of grace is going on in thy soul, and what shall hinder thee from taking to thyself the same rich promises which, as St. Paul tell us, belong to the justified and sanctified believer? "And not only so," says the Apostle, we are not only admitted by faith into this grace, "but we glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us¹." It is a mistake to suppose that the truly religious man must be a melancholy one. Gloom and true religion are

¹ Rom. v. 3, 4, 5.

never allied. "Heaviness may endure for a night," while the Christian is passing through temptation, enduring the buffetings of Satan, and seeking the removal of his spiritual burdens by prayer, and self-communion, and self-examination, and strong crying for pardon; "but joy cometh in the morning¹." As soon as on scriptural grounds (for I always like to see the inquiring Christian not judging of his state by feelings, but bringing his feelings and expectations and intentions to the test of Scripture,) as soon as on scriptural grounds the Christian can be fully satisfied, that he has peace with God through Jesus Christ, the morning of his joy dawns upon him. Heaviness passes away. The spiritual darkness disappears, and his light shineth more and more unto the perfect day. It is then that he glories in tribulation. It is then that the graces of patience, meekness, and humility are wrought into his soul. That eagerness after respect and honour from men, and after short-lived pleasures and

¹ Ps. xxx. 5.

perishable riches subsides ; and the experience of this vain and unsatisfying world works in him, through God's strength, that hope which never makes ashamed. The oftener that he reads his Bible, and the more constant he is in prayer, the sooner and the more rapidly he will proceed from strength to strength, until the power of God displays itself even in his *present* salvation. For even in this life the true Christian can attain to a state like this.

But cometh the blessedness of which we speak, to all who bear the name of Christ ? Can every Christian take to himself the glorious privilege of going on from strength to strength ? Surely not. When the faith which you profess has not reached the heart ; when sin, in any sense, holds dominion over you ; when the world is still the idol before which you bow, with a daily worship ; when its fashions are your laws, and its practices your delight, can you be considered as possessing a justifying faith, or in a state of acceptance with God ? *Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to*

*whom ye obey*¹? Ask yourselves, my brethren, and remember that the question relates to your eternal salvation, ask yourselves what master you have chosen ; whether the love of God through Christ be the predominant principle within you, or whether you do not attempt to mingle with a professed obedience to him, a subjection to other principles and to other masters? Ask yourselves whether you do not sometimes, nay frequently, act in obedience to some strong passion within you ; whether the law of custom, and the caprices of fashion, do not sometimes distort your judgment, and lead you into deviations from the law of God? Ask yourselves whether an eager pursuit after wealth has not alienated you from that service, which alone is perfect freedom? Ask yourselves, in short, whether you do not profess to delight in the law of God after the inward man, while at the same time there is another law in your members warring against the law of your mind, and bringing you into captivity² to vanity, to

¹ Rom. vi. 16.² Rom. vii. 22, 23.

sin, to spiritual death; and unless God in his mercy awakens you in time, to death eternal. While this is the case, the blessedness spoken of in the text cannot be yours. Your strength is not in the Lord, nor are his ways in your heart. *You* pass through the vale of misery, as well as the pious and self-denying Christian. You are exempted neither from sorrow nor from disappointment. But you have shut the well-spring of comfort against yourselves. You have hewed out to yourselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that will hold no water¹. You have said in your heart with the voluptuous monarch of old, “Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure².” You have made, unlike a pious man of old, gold your hope, and have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence³. Instead of ceasing from man whose breath is in his nostrils, you have gloried in human friendship, and not made your boast in God. Instead of living by

¹ Jer. ii. 13.² Eccles. ii. 1.³ Job xxxi. 24.

faith and not by sight, you have walked in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled ¹. Can you be surprised, therefore, that no blessedness should await your misguided choice? Can you be surprised that your joys and sorrows are both worldly,—unsanctified prosperity, and when it comes, unsanctified adversity? My brethren, it is only the true believer, justified by a saving faith, and having peace with God through Jesus Christ, and, in the strength of his Spirit, walking before the Lord unto all pleasing, it is he only that can be called blessed; blessed with the comforts of religion, when he passes through the vale of misery, and kept from falling, when, like Job in *his* prosperity, the candle of the Lord shines upon him. “Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God ².”

Lastly, The pools of water wherewith

¹ Isa. l. 11.

² Isa. l. 10.

the thirsty sojourners were refreshed in passing through a barren and dry land to their earthly Zion, are emblems of those divine ordinances which are the solace of the true Christian on his journey heavenward. Private and congregational prayer, the voice of joy and thanksgiving, in company with them who keep holy-day, do unquestionably afford to the pious Christian a comfort and a joy with which a stranger intermeddleth not. Hence, the quiet and retirement, and sanctity of the Christian sabbath, the morning and evening offerig of prayer and praise, which, like the incense of old, ascends to God as the sweet-smelling savour of inward piety, afford a heart-felt comfort to the Christian sojourner in this his land of wilderness. After a week passed, it may be, in the world, but whether in or out of the world, passed throughout with an unworldly spirit, he delights in appearing before the God of his strength in those holy places where He has placed his name to bless us. One day spent in the courts of the Lord's house, one day altogether devoted to his Creator, Redeemer, and Sanc-

tifier, breathes its own divine fragrance on all the days of the week. He is not satisfied with the morning oblation only; he suffers not impediments easily surmounted to interfere with that prayer, and that praise, which ascend to God as an evening sacrifice. Dear also to his heart are our monthly communions. On them he never turns his back. The thirsty Israelite did not despise the pools filled with water, which refreshed him in his earthly sojourning. So the pious Christian eagerly embraces every opportunity, (and on him no opportunity is lost,) of strengthening and refreshing his soul with the heavenly banquet of his Saviour's body and blood. He never has grace enough. His cry is, Lord, evermore give me this bread¹. Like the Samaritan sinner, his language is, "*Give me this water, that I thirst not*"²;" that my cravings may not be always worldly and unsatisfying. In this world of trouble and temptation, we cannot seek too often strength from God; nor apply with un-

¹ St. John vi. 34.² St. John iv. 15.

necessary frequency for that grace which enables the true followers of the Lord to go on from strength to strength. Our weekly sabbath, our monthly communion, will, under God, prepare us for an endless sabbath, and for that marriage supper of the Lamb to which they who are called will indeed be blessed. These solemn ordinances, duly and faithfully observed, are the divinely appointed means of arraying the soul in that fine linen, clear and white, which is the righteousness of saints. *“The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely¹.”*

¹ Rev. xxii. 17.

SERMON VIII.

THE CHARACTER OF ELIJAH.

2 KINGS ii. 11, 13.

“ And it came to pass, as they still went and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder, and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more.”

THE whole history of Elijah is evidently miraculous. From the time when he first appears in the sacred volume, to that in which he is translated into heaven, he seems to be a singularly gifted and most extraordinary being. The question put to John the Baptist, by the learned doctors of

the law, *Art thou Elias*¹; the last prediction in the Old Testament pronounced by Malachi, the last of the Jewish prophets; *Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord*²; the current opinion which was thenceforward entertained by the Jewish priests, that Elias would reappear on the earth before the manifestation of the Messiah, and lastly the high honor conferred on him by selecting him as one of the attendant spirits at our Lord's transfiguration, all these circumstances concur in giving a kind of moral, but awful sublimity to the character of this Prophet. Even the admission of St. James, that "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are"³, as if such admission were required to induce the persuasion, that he was no more than man, and the Apostle's proposing the example of this singular man as an instance of the availing efficacy of fervent prayer, even these additional cir-

¹ St. John i. 21.² Malachi iv. 5.³ St. James v. 17.

cumstances seem highly to exalt the character of Elijah. The question may therefore be asked of me, why I should bring this character before you, since it cannot be a model for us to imitate. Gifts so miraculous, situations of such unparalleled difficulty, it may be suggested, can excite admiration only. The person thus gifted and thus circumstanced, is raised too high above us, to afford us any lessons of practical or useful instruction. You will find, my brethren, as I proceed in this history, that the question is easily answered, and the suggestion silenced in no difficult manner. The character, though gifted in no ordinary manner, is still the character of a mortal and even fallible man. The situations, in which he was placed, though as to the miraculous circumstances beyond our sphere, yet are attended with other circumstances similar to those of ordinary Christians. And although much, very much of the history is neither level with our experience, nor similar to our calls of duty, yet there is something in them from which we may derive a salutary warning, and

be stimulated to our respective duties by a wholesome example. Let us therefore, with prayer for the divine blessing on the undertaking, proceed to meditate on the character and history of Elijah.

The manner in which Elijah is first introduced to notice in the sacred records is peculiarly awful and sublime. He seems like an inhabitant of another world, descending on earth in a crisis of uncommon depravity to rouse a guilty nation from its degrading slumbers, which were approaching fast to a spiritual death. “And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, *As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain in these years but according to my word*¹.” No information is given of his previous life, of his call to the prophetic office; no introduction of the commission with which he was charged, by the usual mention of the name of the Almighty. *Thus saith the Lord*, is not pro-

¹ 1 Kings xvii. 1.

nounced. He speaks as by his own authority. And stern was the decree which thus went forth from his lips. It was a declaration of seemingly relentless severity. But it was as suited to the times, as he who delivered it was to the circumstances under which he spake. The land of Israel had now reached the climax of depravity. Governed by a king weak in intellect, the slave of his passions, and wholly given up to idolatry, it was indeed a land on which the moral Governor of the Universe, He who had once led his people like a flock of sheep, and was always jealous over his inheritance, must have looked with abhorrence. Instigated by an abandoned woman, Ahab had sold himself unto wickedness. Under female influence, which when used for good is productive of the greatest benefit to individuals, families, or communities, and when employed for evil, is the most portentous source of misery and of crime—under such influence, *there was none like unto Ahab*, says the sacred historian, *which did sell himself to work wickedness in*

*the sight of the Lord*¹. The instigatrix to all his depravity is immediately noticed, *whom Jezebel his wife stirred up*¹. Oh what a warning is it to Christians to beware of intimacies, especially the close alliance of marriage, with persons of unholy habits and licentious principles. It was at a time like this, that Elijah was raised up by the Almighty, as the reprover of wickedness in high places, and the opposer of ungodliness, though upheld by two royal delinquents. And his was a spirit suited to the awful emergency. The Almighty Lord of heaven and earth seems on this occasion to have honoured the messenger of his wrath with an outward distinction of no ordinary kind. The very elements were placed at his command. Nature was compelled to obey his mandate. The clouds poured out their treasures, or the heavens became like brass over a guilty land at his word. The prayer which he was inspired to offer was immediately heard by the God who inspired it. To this circumstance St. James alludes

¹ 1 Kings xxi. 25.

when he speaks "of the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man¹."

As soon as Elijah delivered his commission, he retired into privacy and solitude. The judgment was left to work its way on the hearts of the king and his people. But though withdrawn from public observation, and living in that retirement which has under God been so often the nurse of wisdom and of virtue, he was not forgotten by the merciful Being, whose minister of vengeance he had been made. For three years he was supported in a miraculous manner. Ravens were taught of God to bring "him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening." His drink was the water of the brook near which he sojourned². At length the brook dried up; and the prophet seemed destined to death under the very calamity which had visited his guilty nation. Again, the Lord whom he faithfully served, and with whom his hours of hallowed commu-

¹ St. James v. 16.

² 1 Kings xvii. 6.

nion were passed, interposed in his behalf. *Arise, get thee to Zarephath*, was the order which he received from the lips of his heavenly Master, *and dwell there ; behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee*¹. And there was he sustained. While he dwelt under her lowly roof, *the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail*².

At length he received the Divine command to appear before Ahab. What a scene is now preparing ; a transaction in which the Lord God of Israel condescended to enter into a contest with the idols, which had robbed him of his honour. It is impossible, my brethren, to detail even the outlines of the wonderful history. Let me hope that it is familiar to many who hear me. But only imagine to yourselves this holy man of God, so far from being supported, almost overborne by the wrath of a king, standing single-handed, as to human eyes it seemed, but with strength not his own, to contend with eight hundred and

¹ 1 Kings xvii. 9.

² Ibid. verse 16.

fifty false prophets, honoured and cherished by an idolatrous queen, and prepared for every effort to uphold the tottering fabric of idolatry. The issue of the contest is well known. "*The Lord he is the God, the Lord he is the God*¹!" was the cry extorted from the unwilling lips of a whole assembled people, which witnessed the discomfiture of idolatry. I need not add, that the blessing of heaven followed this display of right feeling in a people. *And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain*².

But Satan has never suffered his strong holds to be demolished without a vigorous effort to repair the breach. In this instance he had a willing agent in an abandoned woman. See Ahab withheld from injuring the prophet by Almighty influence; see him even obedient to the prophet's directions, and submitting to the extermination of the very men, who had by their pernicious doctrines spread a moral poison through the land; see him retiring in shame, and

¹ 1 Kings xviii. 39.

² Ibid. verse 41.

communicating the event to the adviser, whom in a fatal hour he had placed so near to his counsels—his reckless wife. Her wicked heart immediately devises schemes of mischief against Elijah. She sent a messenger to him saying, *So let the Gods do to me and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them* (she means her slaughtered favourites) *by to-morrow about this time*¹. Heavy were the tidings to the prophet. Now he shows himself, as St. James describes him to be, “*a man subject to like passions as we are* ;” and he, who had just opposed, and successfully opposed, a host of the enemies of the Lord, quails under the threats of a woman. In a wilderness, under a juniper tree, he bewails his disconsolate state, and prays for death. *It is enough ; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers*². Painful it is to witness this self-desertion of one like Elijah : painful to hear the mournings of a soul from which as it would seem the comforts of God’s Spirit were with-

¹ 1 Kings xix. 2.² Ibid. verse 4.

drawn. Does it not recal to our recollection the mental agony of One greater than Elijah, of One whose warfare was not with the idolatries of a single kingdom, but with the dominion of Satan over a whole world; of One, who had not retired from a victory gloriously won, but was on the eve of *treading the wine-press alone, the wine-press of the wrath of Almighty God*¹? But our Heavenly Father suits his dispensations to the necessities of his servants. *As their day is, so is always their strength*². To the beloved Son, in whom he was always well pleased, and to whom he had given his Spirit without measure, he sends an angel to strengthen him. One of the same ministering spirits was employed to comfort the soul, and sustain the sinking body of Elijah. Heavenly food was the sustenance provided for him. I call it heavenly food, because, although the material part was no other than a cake of bread and a cruse of water³, yet no common supplies of spiritual strength

¹ Isaiah lxiii. 3.

² Deut. xxxiii. 25.

³ 1 Kings xix. 6.

accompanied the heaven-descended meal. It sustained him during a fast of forty days. In the strength of that meat he went forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God. It was on that mount that the singular transaction took place, in which the Almighty seems, by a significant emblem, to have pointed out to Elijah, that, however determined he may be, as had been recently and awfully shown, never to clear the guilty, yet he is *long-suffering and gracious, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*. "*Behold the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind : and after the wind an earthquake : but the Lord was not in the earthquake : and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire : and after the fire a still small voice*¹." Elijah had just witnessed, and had just participated in two transactions, which showed the Almighty under his character of a God to whom vengeance belongeth.

¹ 1 Kings xix. 11, 12.

A famine of three years' duration, the extermination by the sword of eight hundred and fifty men, were events of a terrific kind, calculated to give sternness and severity to the character of his prophet, which was distinguished by a hardihood and firmness of a most extraordinary kind. This affecting emblem, *the still small voice*, was calculated to show that God in judgment remembers mercy, and that he will draw with the cords of a man those whom he makes *willing in the day of his power*¹. It was an emblem also of that dispensation of mercy, revealed to Christians, wherein, although the death of the Son of God for sin shows the abhorrence with which God looks on sin, yet it manifests at the same time the yearnings of fatherly love, with which in mercy he contemplates the sinner. Nay more. He is pleased to correct the erroneous notion which the prophet had formed of the extent of his country's depravity. *I, even I only, am left*. This was seemingly a vainglorious exultation. The prophet

¹ Psalm cx. 3. Bib. Ver.

was a man of like passions with us. The Almighty checks the vain assumption even in his favoured prophet. He wills not that his servants, however distinguished by his mercies, should be *exalted above measure*. *A thorn in the flesh* ¹ was given to St. Paul to prevent an undue exaltation after the revelations vouchsafed to him. The disclosure made to Elijah must have humbled him in his own estimation. *Yet I have left me*, such was the Lord's declaration, *seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him* ².

I pass over the transaction of Ahab with Naboth ³, and again that of Ahaziah with his false God ⁴. These are transactions which show Elijah to be still the uncompromising reprove of wickedness, the fearless denouncer of divine judgments, in short, an awful spirit calculated for times of such predominant depravity, and always employed, more or less, as the minister of

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 7.

² 1 Kings xix. 18.

³ 1 Kings xxi.

⁴ 2 Kings i. 1—3.

divine vengeance. I hasten to the termination of his earthly career, suited to a character of such dauntless, fearless magnanimity. A whirlwind was used by the Almighty, when he was pleased to take Elijah to himself without his tasting death. A chariot of fire, and horses of fire; these were not literally such. But cherubims, assuming a fiery appearance, and bearing a resemblance to the conveyance spoken of, were his vehicle to heaven. The highest order of angels, clad in terrors, and seeming like ministers of vengeance, were employed in the translation of him, who had throughout his singular life been the instrument for punishing an idolatrous king, a reckless queen, and an infatuated multitude; that multitude always so ready to listen to their superiors in station, when the call given is either to irreligion in heart, or to profligacy in manners.

We have now contemplated, my brethren, this extraordinary character and history. I proceed to a short practical application. Let me hope that it may be found neither useless nor uninteresting.

1. The workings of Divine providence in the affairs of his church, form always to the pious mind a delightful subject of contemplation. It is wonderful to observe, how admirably the Almighty selects his instruments for the execution of his purposes. It required such a commanding spirit as Elijah's to meet the difficulties of the situation in which he was placed. Had it been otherwise constituted, it would have yielded to the dominant force of overwhelming circumstances. Such a character as Luther's was the one precisely suited to the appalling obstacles which stood in the way of the reformation of the Church of Christ from the errors and abuses of popery. It was his undaunted resolution, his freedom from all fear of man, which fitted him for the task. A similar spirit actuated the great reformer of the Church of Scotland. Had not Knox been the man that he was, he must have sunk under the dangers which awaited him. And although mildness, moderation, and self-command, formed the character of Cranmer, the great bulwark of the reformation in the Church of England, yet

these qualities more especially suited him for the times in which he lived, and the caprices of the monarch with whom he had to deal. I forbear to pursue the subject. Abundant cause have we to trust in God, that, in the present and approaching difficulties with which the Church of England has to contend, he can in mercy raise up within her walls, if such be his gracious pleasure, instruments enough to advance his glory and promote its real good. Abundant cause have we to trust in God, that, amidst the difficulties with which we in this land may have to contend, and notwithstanding the waywardness and perverseness of man's heart by nature, and more especially of untaught and uninstructed man, the moral Governor of the world can always raise up master-spirits to conquer every difficulty, and promote his counsels of wisdom and love.

2. I consider Elijah as a type of the law; that is, I see in the spirit which actuated him, and the course of severe and unrelenting vengeance which he was called to pursue, a representation of the terrors of

the law. Its sentence is, *This do and thou shalt live*¹. The counterpart to the sentence is this, *This do not, and thou shalt die. By the law is the knowledge of sin*²: by the law the sentence of death is passed on the commission of it. Under the law there is no escape from the penalty. *The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law*³. But *grace and truth* have come *by Jesus Christ*⁴. If the law has its terrors, the Gospel contains the only refuge from them. If the law resembles the wind in its fury, the earthquake in its devastation, and the fire in its consuming qualities, the gospel is the still small voice of God. It breathes mercy and compassion. It contains the doctrines of pardon and of grace. The law convinces the sinner that he is lost and undone, and that, if he is saved, he must be saved by grace. The gospel comforts him with the assurance that grace has brought salvation, the debt is paid, the penalty endured, and that nothing remains

¹ Luke x. 28.² Romans iii. 20.³ 1 Cor. xv. 56.⁴ St. John i. 17.

to the sinner but to believe in his heart unto righteousness, and to show, by his conversion from sin to holiness, that he really feels the faith which he professes. How necessary therefore is that repentance which spares no sin, which exterminates every appetite warring against the law of God, and follows the Lord with an undivided heart. How necessary was it that the forerunner of our Lord, and the preacher of repentance, should come in the spirit and power of Elijah, denouncing God's judgments against sin, and "turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just¹." Oh may we all be endued with the spirit of Elijah in contending with our besetting sins. May we imitate his uncompromising character, and be *exceedingly jealous for the Lord our God*, that no other master may have dominion over us.

3. Strength is laid for us on One mighty to save. See the man of God in the strength of food, small in quantity but

¹ Coll. Third Sunday in Advent.

precious in its efficacy, going forth to a long and enduring fast, to a hunger and thirst of forty days and forty nights' duration. In the same strength let us go forth to a yet more painful fasting; a total abstinence from those unlawful habits under which we may hitherto have been enslaved. Let us go forth to our conflict with our spiritual foes, fasting from the food of sin which pampers the soul as well as body, and dooms both to death eternal, fasting from our covetousness, our lust and our revenge, fasting from our worldly-mindedness and indifference to God. Let us *go forth in the strength of the Lord God, and make mention of his righteousness only*¹. More especially I would call on you, my young friends, evermore to seek this living bread, evermore to seek the strength of heavenly grace, evermore to rely not on your own righteousness, but on that salvation which has been purchased for you by your Redeemer.

4. Idolatry was that besetting sin of the

¹ Psalm lxxi. 14.

Jewish nation which involved it in all its troubles. To subdue this prevailing and engrossing propensity Elijah was raised up, inflicting famine on a guilty land, and exterminating with the sword the upholders of idolatrous practices. The Christian world bows down to idols of its own making. Christians provoke the Lord to jealousy by loving the world and themselves more than God, by seeking their own things more than the things of the Lord Jesus. Let the history before us teach us the course which we are to pursue in conquering in our own hearts our besetting sin. Halt no longer between two opinions; we cannot serve two masters. If you will have the world for one of them, you are no longer Christ's. Take the one whom you prefer, and cleave wholly to him. Neither your Creator, nor your Redeemer, will have a divided heart. It must be theirs entirely or not at all. And oh brethren, in thus maintaining a godly jealousy over your hearts, may you possess the dauntless, fearless, unconciliating temper of Elijah. No deceit, nor compromising, nor evasion,

nor equivocation, where the salvation of your souls is at stake. Thus acting, may the almighty grace of the Lord Jesus be ever with you, your support in the wilderness of life, your inexhaustible barrel of meal, your unfailing cruse of oil. Thus acting, and thus sustained, may your spirits, when your earthly course is ended, be carried by angels into the paradise of God, to be for ever with the Lord Jesus Christ.

SERMON IX.

ON THE PRESENT AND FUTURE JOY OF THE
REDEEMED OF THE LORD.

ISAIAH li. 11.

“ Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion ; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head : they shall obtain gladness and joy ; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.”

AMONG all the events which the sure word of prophecy declares to be fast approaching, not one, perhaps, is more clearly revealed than that of the restoration of the Jews to the land of their fathers. Accordingly, the prophets abound with expressions relating to this grand event. And it is always with great joy of heart, that they either directly predict, or indirectly allude to, a circumstance in their national history

which proves that God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. It seems very probable that, in the words of the text, the Prophet Isaiah foretells this glorious change in the condition of his people, which will take place in the latter days. But it is not on account of its reference to this event, that I have brought his beautiful expressions before your notice. I conceive that there is the greatest harmony throughout the whole Bible, and that its glowing descriptions of future events have always some relation to the spiritualizing effects of the Gospel of Christ. "Jesus is the testimony of prophecy:" and, whether it refers or not to events taking place, or yet to take place in this world, yet such is the language used, that it can, without any forced construction, be made to bear, not only on the outward diffusion of the Gospel, but also on its inward establishment in the hearts of men. Indeed it would appear, that we should degrade the elevation of spirit which it breathes, if we should confine it to outward events, however glorious. The return of a single soul to God through

Christ Jesus is a source of greater joy and gladness, than any restoration of a nation, however beloved and honoured, however afterwards scattered and peeled, to the land given unto them by God for a lasting possession. The redemption of the world from sin, and its fatal consequences, would alone, and of itself, seem to authorize the expressions of everlasting joy being on the head of a returning sinful race. The utter departure of sorrow and mourning can only be understood of that day, that jubilee in God's creation, when the Lord Jesus shall put his believing and confiding people in possession of their promised inheritance. It is in this point of view that I shall endeavour to take the words of the text : and I am sure you will agree with me, that, among all unfulfilled predictions, none is so worthy of your serious consideration, none so comforting to your dearest hopes, and none, at the same time, so powerfully awakening to all your fears, as that which points to the glory of the ransomed soul, and consequently to the misery of that unrepenting sinner, who will not come to

the Saviour that he might have life. *Therefore the redeemed of the Lord, says the Prophet, shall return, and come with singing unto Zion ; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head ; they shall obtain gladness and joy ; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.*

1. And who can with such propriety be called the redeemed of the Lord, as they whom he has delivered from the power as well as penalty of sin ? What captivity so deplorable as that under which the sinner lies, when he is in bondage to the evil passions of an evil nature ! The high spirit of educated and civilized man spurns at the very idea of slavery. What would he not endure to escape from its galling bonds ! Yet the same man will, by continued indulgence, make himself the slave to his passions. Can we be surprised to find an inspired Apostle declaring of a person thus degraded, that he is "sold under sin?" To be redeemed from this bondage is the great blessing which our redemption by Christ has procured for us. It is the fault of the Christian, if he submits to the bondage any longer. The law

of the spirit of life is intended to free him from the law of sin. But much is required on his part. The conflict which he is called on to wage with himself is called in Scripture "a warfare." The successful combatant is styled "a good soldier in Jesus Christ." He must keep under his body and bring it into subjection. He must watch his heart and all its avenues to ill. He must "not sleep as do others: he must watch and be sober." He must take up his cross daily, the cross on which evil inclinations are crucified. He must deny himself. All this requires patient perseverance and active exertion. He must put on the whole armour of God, "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." Such are the terms on which the Holy Spirit of God will enable us to be conquerors. Such are the terms on which the great Captain of our salvation promises us redemption from captivity to our lusts. Such are the terms on which the redeemed of the Lord will return to their forfeited Sion. Contrast with this course of patient self-denial the habits of

sensual and immoral men. All their habits betoken self-indulgence. Their whole system of life turns on self-indulgence as its centre. A praying spirit, a course of self-denial, form no part of their daily living. Is it any matter of surprise that, with such habits, Christians, that is, professing Christians, run into excesses contrary to the purity of the Christian law? *Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination?* asked the prophet. *Nay, they were not ashamed, neither could they blush*¹.

2. Who again can with such propriety be called the redeemed of the Lord, as they whom he ransoms from that all-conquering foe, who puts all things under his feet? When we see friends and relations stretched on the bed of death, life to all human appearance for ever fled; when we follow their remains "to the house appointed for all living" and see them consigned to their kindred dust; when, on the opening of long-closed graves, we see here and there the dry bones as in the vision of

¹ Jer. vi. 15.

Ezekiel scattered through the valley of the shadow of the death, what would be the question which nature unassisted by revelation would ask? *Can these bones live*¹? Will they who are in the grave ever come forth? Yes, the Redeemer answers; *I have the keys of hell and of death*². At the voice of the Son of God all shall come forth. "The sea shall give up the dead that are in it, and death and hell (or the grave) shall deliver up the dead which are in them." "I will ransom them from the power of the grave: I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be thy plagues: O grave, I will be thy destruction³." Such is the redemption of the body designed for the redeemed of the Lord.

3. But must the soul lie insensible with the body until this general redemption? Must ages pass before the redeemed of the Lord enjoy a foretaste of their redemption? No, my Christian brethren. "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise," said the

¹ Ezek. xxxvii. 3. ² Rev. i. 18.

³ Rev. xx. 13. Hos. xiii. 14.

Redeemer to a penitent sinner redeemed at the moment of death. And do you think that the lovingkindness of the Lord is confined to a single individual? Is paradise open to the soul of only one penitent? O no. *Because I live, ye shall live also*¹, said the Redeemer to all his disciples. And one of his faithful followers was so assured of this truth, that he looked on death as gain. *To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*², said St. Paul. Hence he had even a desire to depart from life. And why? that he might be with Christ. And was it in the body that he desired thus to be with Christ? No. The body of St. Paul has for ages mouldered into dust with the millions who have lived and died. He knew that such would be the case. His soul is with his Lord. His life was devoted to Christ, and death proved his greatest gain.

4. But are there not some considerations to be taken by us into account on this sub-

¹ St. John xiv. 19.

² Phil. i. 21.

ject? Is there not some blessing—a blessing beyond all other blessings, which makes these a matter of everlasting joy to the redeemed of the Lord. Our Redeemer might by his Spirit release his faithful people from captivity to sin: he might unbar the gates of the grave, which enclose the body; he might admit the soul into the invisible world; but, since holiness is the law of his kingdom, and all have fallen short of it, what atonement is there for the offences even of his own people? What resource for them who have fallen under the dominion of sin, and without a mediator must abide its penalty? Here, my brethren, the redeemed of the Lord take up their song of joy and gladness. Our surety, they say, has suffered for us: in bringing many sons to glory our Jesus has been made perfect through sufferings; he has made reconciliation for sin. He “suffered the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. All we like sheep have gone astray, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. Worthy is the

Lamb who was slain, and who has redeemed us to God by his blood ¹." *Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.*

How many ideas, my brethren, must rise in our minds on considering this part of my subject, in connexion with the word—*return*! In the first place, we view man as "far gone from original righteousness," and wandering from the only fold where he was safe from destruction. In Christ Jesus we see him returning, placed in a condition of recovering not only the forfeited gift of immortality, but also the original perfection in which he was created. In the second place, we contemplate individual sinners convinced of their sin, and returning "to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls." We see the young, who had been led away by the snares of an evil

¹ Heb. ii. 10. 1 Peter iii. 18. Is. liii. 6. Rev. v. 9—12.

world, by the temptations of youth, the insinuations of evil companions, and above all by their own evil hearts, brought to a sense of their dangerous state, hastening to lay their repentance and sorrows at the foot of the cross, and returning to the Redeemer of his people. We see the old, after years of alienation from God, and liable every moment to receive the wages of sin, which is death eternal, we see them brought to themselves before their last hour is spent, seeking the Lord from whose service they had so long estranged themselves, renouncing each his favourite sin, extirpating, with God's grace, each his deeply rooted corruption of soul, and returning to their Lord. See them after years, if not of downright irreligion, yet of likewarmness and indifference to religion, seeking for a new heart, and for a right spirit within them, renouncing a world which they have found by sad experience to have always deceived them, giving up the dangerous companion, whose sophistry had beguiled their understanding, while his example has endangered their soul;

and bending their steps to a heavenly Zion where alone everlasting joy will be upon their head. Every true Christian must rejoice when he either witnesses or hears of such real conversions as these; an entire change of soul and its affections, a renewal of the inward nature, a spiritual and heavenward tendency imparted to them who have been formerly "earthly, sensual, and devilish." Surely such a return as this of a sinner from the error of his ways, will justify the boldest language, which the ancient prophets ever used. Think only for a moment of one soul redeemed from eternal damnation, and you cannot but enter into all the beautiful metaphors used in ancient prophecy to denote the glorious event. "I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord." "How shall I give thee up Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled to-

gether¹." Hear this, ye penitent and returning sinners, sinners returning to your Lord; and comfort yourselves with the gracious assurances. Let the redeemed of the Lord, whom the Lord hath thus made "willing in the day of his power," return and come with singing unto Sion.

There are two views, my brethren, under which the latter part of the text may be considered, both edifying and consolatory. When we know, what all Scripture teaches, that "there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus;" that is, to Christ's faithful followers; when we know and are assured, moreover, that "being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," we must acknowledge that no greater joy can be felt in this world, than when the sinner feels himself, on scriptural grounds, entitled to take to himself this abundant consolation. When he can say, and say it on the best proofs, Such was I once, but now I am "sanctified," now I am "justified in the name of the Lord

¹ Hos. ii. 19, 20. Ibid. xi. 8.

Jesus, and by the Spirit of my God ;” when he can look to his heart, and feel its corruptions being conquered, its evil being rooted out ; when he can look to his life, and see altered habits, a temper altogether changed, and the servant of sin becoming day by day the servant of holiness, “ everlasting joy must be on his head, he must obtain gladness and joy.” And although the tears of true repentance must be mingled with that joy in his cup of blessedness ; although it must not be, that he must assure himself of salvation ; although he must still “ work it out with fear and trembling,” yet he must feel a peace of soul unknown to him in his days of maddening riot, of licentious merriment, perhaps even of unbelief. When he was under the dominion of his corrupt nature, and the gay companion, the midnight revel, and the bowl of intemperance were dear to his heart ; his joy was like the crackling of thorns under a pot, noisy, flashing, and transient. He would then say “ to laughter, It is mad, and of mirth, What doeth it ?” Even in such laughter his heart was sad. Now, however, the case is changed.

He reads the Scriptures; and though every page contains a condemnation of his former life, and a fresh incentive to humiliation and repentance, yet every page also contains encouragement to him to persevere in his godly course, and stirs him up to redoubled exertion in the work of the Lord. He has become "acquainted with God, and is at peace." "His soul returns to its rest," because it has returned to its Saviour; his soul obtains gladness and joy, because "the Lord has dealt bountifully with him."

But as long as the redeemed of the Lord dwell in this troubled and uncertain world—as long as they carry about with them this body of sin and death, and are therefore engaged in perpetual warfare with an evil world and an evil heart—as long as any fear mingles with their hope, and they dread, lest through want of vigilance, or of prayer, their crown of rejoicing should be taken from them, their gladness and joy can never be full. It is only when they reach the heavenly Zion, that sorrow and mourning shall flee away. The trial of

their faith, tried as it often is now with fire, shall then be found unto praise and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ¹. Here indeed, on a subject so transcendently glorious, even the language of Christ's inspired Apostles is inadequate to express their conceptions of the glory that shall be revealed. St. Paul, for instance, felt that words were unequal to the expression of his thoughts on this sublime subject. He multiplies those words to convey, however inadequately, the loftiness of his conceptions. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding," or, as the original words may be rendered, "from an exceeding to an exceeding, and eternal weight of glory²." When the triumphs of the righteous are complete—when they have been "faithful unto death," and they "receive the crown of life,"—when they have "overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of testimony," and are set down with Christ on his throne,—when they hear the

¹ 1 Pet. i. 7.² 2 Cor. iv. 17.

sentence pronounced, which fixes their blessedness for ever and ever; a Saviour honouring them, and confessing them before his Father, angels hailing them as their fellow-servants in the Father's household in heaven, parents rejoicing to see their children accepted and rewarded, children lauding a parent's name as the instruments in God's hand of their glory; "the spirits of all the just" assembled before the throne; it is then that the joy of the true Christian will be complete. It is then that the redeemed of the Lord will indeed, in the truest and noblest sense, "return and come with singing unto Zion;" it is then that "everlasting joy will be on their head, and they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away."

Such is the glorious prospect placed before you—before every one of you, from the least to the greatest; such the blessedness to which you can attain through the aid of the Holy Spirit, and the merits of Jesus Christ. Let me remind you, in conclusion, that though outward religion be

the guard and fortress of inward piety, yet it is unavailing to salvation, unless such piety be grafted into our souls. The state of the Christian world in general, our own circumstances as a Church, and as individual Christians in particular, require that this caution should be repeatedly impressed on us in all its force, and comprehensive-ness of meaning. Our blessed Lord, knowing the inbred corruption of the human heart, demands from every one of his disciples the conversion of that heart to God. "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." To this point, my Christian brethren, let your best exertions, under God, be directed; for this purpose let your prayers be daily offered up; for that inward change to take place, without which none of us can be fit for the kingdom of God. We must not only abstain from the outward act of disobedience; the inward desire of it is to be resisted and overcome. "Every imagination, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, must

be cast down, and every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

"Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert an highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it¹."

¹ Isai. xl. 3, 4, 5.

SERMON X.

THE KEEPING OF CHRIST'S COMMANDMENTS,
THE PROOF OF UNION WITH HIM.

1 JOHN iii. 24.

“And he that keepeth his commandments, dwelleth in him, and he in him.”

EVERY one who studies carefully the word of God, (and what true Christian will fail to make it his delight and counsellor?) will admire the consistency which prevails in it throughout. He will often, it is true, pause for a while to admire particular passages. These passages he will often commit to memory. He will make them his guide and his rule through the varied scenes of life. But he will never consider them as single, and detached from other

texts of Scripture. He will rather study the connexion between them all, and thus treasure up within him the whole counsel of God for his salvation. He will see that universal holiness is the law of the Gospel; he will see that the heart of the Christian is the fountain which Christ has aimed to make pure; and he will also readily discern, that the outward conduct will correspond to the inward purification, and the goodness of the fruit show the ingrafted virtue of the tree. "Whereunto he has already attained, he will walk by the same rule, he will mind the same thing¹"—that rule is God's word, that thing is the perfection to which that word calls, and invites and constrains the real believer.

I would make another remark, before I proceed to the main subject of the discourse. It has been sometimes thought, that the religion of the Gospel is a mere system of rules, that the affections have nothing to do with it, that we should be observers of its practical precepts, and

¹ Phil. iii. 16.

perform our several duties to society and to our neighbour, without feeling or endeavouring to feel our affections interested in it, lest we should become fanatics and enthusiasts. If this mistake should prevail among any that hear me, let me at once guard them against it, as being no less dangerous than it is untrue. Does not our Lord make love to God, and that love a supreme love, a love occupying all our soul and strength, does he not make it "the first commandment?" Has not an inspired Apostle pronounced an awful anathema on them who "love not the Lord Jesus Christ?" Consider our Lord's character of a penitent sinner. "Her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much : but to whom little is forgiven," he adds, "the same loveth little¹;"—still that person loveth—thus establishing the rule that in proportion to our sense of a Saviour's value, and to our conviction of our own weaknesses, frailties, and sins, will be the internal feeling of affection to our redeeming

¹ St. Luke vii. 47.

Lord. Consider the commendation bestowed on Mary above the worldly-minded Martha, and observe the preference given by our Lord to one who devotes herself, wholly and exclusively, to the love of listening to a Saviour's instructions. "Lovest thou me?" was a question thrice repeated by Christ to one who had professed to go with him to prison and to death. Read the account given by the sacred historian of the early Christians—their gladness of heart on receiving the word of the Gospel, their rejoicing in shame and reproach for the sake of Christ, their devotedness to their Lord: and judge whether the affections of the heart ought not to be engaged on the side of religion. Follow Paul to the dungeon, and read of his singing with Silas, "praises to God;" and finally, read St. John's Epistles, and determine for yourselves, whether the joy and faith of the Christian are to be a cold, inanimate, lifeless, outward profession, or a self-devotedness, proceeding from a warm and zealous heart, which is full of love to God and Christ. Believe me, my brethren, they

who would remove the influence of your affections from your faith, and make you cold towards Christ, afraid of any warmth and zeal for him, lest you should be called enthusiasts, deprive you of much internal comfort, as well as disqualify you for shining like lights in the world. They would make you ashamed of Christ and his words, in times when prevailing lukewarmness and disregard of holy things require the servants of the Lord to oppose a careless and ill-judging world with decided firmness. They would prevent you from loving your Lord, lest that love should prompt you to make every sacrifice for his sake. They would reduce, in short, the standard of Christian morality to the lowest point of depression, and sever it from what is its animating principle, love to Him who died for us, lest your warmth should reproach their coldness, lest your scrupulous conscience should make theirs appear in an unfavourable light, if not "straining at the gnat, yet swallowing the camel," and your love, transcendent, internal love to your Redeemer, displaying itself in the

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preference which you always give to him above a vain world, should put to open shame and rebuke their heartless faith, and all their false professions.

A careful consideration of the text, and an application of it to our own circumstances, will, I hope, prove to you the justice of the observations which I have made.

“He that keepeth his commandments,” that is, the commandments of Jesus Christ, “dwelleth in Christ, and Christ in him.”

Let us now carefully consider this short, but powerful, description of Christian morality. The commandments of Christ! To know what these commandments are, requires a full and diligent study of the whole of the New Testament. You must read it throughout with such meek submission of your whole heart to its requirements, as to have the spirit of the Gospel thoroughly worked up into all the faculties of your souls. Observe the spirituality which Christ gives to the law of the Father, as contained in the ten commandments. It is not the open act only, which he forbids. It is every tendency to it, which he authori-

tatively denounces. The lustful imagination, the evil desire arising in the heart, are adultery in his sight. Anger, revenge, and malice, are included within the range of his prohibitions, as violations of the law of God. Speech and conversation betraying irreverence towards God, are equivalent to swearing. The regulation of the heart and all its affections, is his express command. The love of God with all the heart is made by him the first commandment; and the second, like unto the first, is the love of our neighbour. Repentance and conversion to God, are the required first steps to his religion. "A new birth unto righteousness," through the Spirit of God, is the imagery employed in denoting the internal change expected from us—a daily self-denial, and bearing of our cross, that which should accompany us in all our progress; an abiding with him, an union so strict and close as to be compared to that of branches with the parent vine—a love of him even beyond that which we bear for father, mother, wife, or children; these are the requirements made by his

own divine lips. Consider the various ways in which his chosen Apostles built on this foundation, and raised on it the superstructure of the Christian temper and life. Hear them establishing faith, a vital faith in their Lord, as the groundwork on which to build ; and follow them in their descriptions of the holy building. What piety to God, what love of the Redeemer, what charity or Christian love, what heavenly-mindedness do they enjoin ! The mind of their Master, they say, must be the mind which should be in all his followers. Their humility to be like his ; their condescension, their love for each other's souls, their regard to the power of example, their deadness to the world, their superiority to temptations, their love of the Father, their living a life of faith, and spending their sojourning here with such constant, un-deviating seriousness, as is the effect of a heart-felt reverence and fear, as well as love of God ; in all these respects the mind of the follower is to be the same as that of the Master.

This, my brethren, is but an outline of

Christian duty—a mere sketch of the commandments of Christ. You must perceive from it, however, that it is not a cold and lifeless rule of outward conduct which is enjoined. Love is the animating principle—love to God and love to Christ—the heart, which is the seat of all our affections, is to be newly created, and instead of being enslaved to the world, it is to be devoted to God; a guileless simplicity of intention, as well as zeal, and promptitude, and laboriousness of exertion are required, and the man of God is to be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto good works. You have heard the words of the text. Did you, on hearing them, feel and know what was meant by the commandments of Christ? Have you made his holy law so much your study, that, on hearing the words of the text, you immediately caught a view of the demands which he makes of your heart and its affections, as well as of your lives and all their varied circumstances? Is all right within? Is there no conscience among us, like the hand which, by its writing, disturbed the Persian king in his

midnight revels, is there no conscience among us, which whispers, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting¹?" Does it say to one, Thy religion is mere outside; thy heart is not in it; a cold and formal worship; a mere Pharisaic, worldly righteousness? Does it say to another, Thy life is at variance with thy Lord's commandments? The lust of the flesh, and not a self-denying Lord, is thy master. Does it say to a third, Thou lovest the world more than thy God? The world occupies thy whole heart six days in the week, and on the seventh for two or three hours it spares only a portion of that heart for thy Saviour. Does it say to a fourth—but I forbear to pursue the painful detail. Oh that we could all say, and say it from our hearts, The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is "my God for ever and ever, he shall be my guide unto death." His "kingdom and the righteousness thereof," will I "seek first," and above all things. Does pleasure seduce me, does

¹ Dan. v. 5. 27.

the love of money tempt me, does a vain world invite me? No! My heart I yield to him. Lord, increase my faith. "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face: my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek ¹."

I now proceed to two other views of the subject, which, I trust, are both scriptural and important, and deserving of our most serious consideration. They are grounded on the text, taken in connexion with other passages of Scripture. One is expressed; the other implied. You cannot keep the commandments of Christ, unless you dwell in him. And when you do keep them, it is a sign and a proof that you dwell in him, and he in you.

1. The expression, *dwell in Christ*, may be clothed in a figure, but it denotes a wonderful reality. You dwell in your Lord and Saviour, only through faith and love wrought in you by his Spirit. *No man can say that Jesus is the Lord*, to a saving purpose, *but by the Holy Ghost* ². Faith, then,

¹ Ps. xxvii. 8.—Bib. Vers.

² 1 Cor. xii. 3.

is the gift of God. "Love also is of God ¹." And when the faith which God gives, and the love which he inspires are in your hearts, influencing their affections, and giving to you that heaven-descended, that spiritually-created temper which the children of God possess, then you dwell in your redeeming Lord, and He dwells in you. He dwells in you by his Spirit, and you dwell in Him, because you derive all your spiritual energy from his life-giving power. What words can express the union of the believer with Christ! Take his own description of it. He alone can illustrate and explain it. "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me ²." Are you conscious to yourselves, that some temper of mind, some evil desire of the heart predominates within you? Then you do not dwell in Christ. The plant which is growing and is cherished within you, is not of his planting. A true faith has not ingrafted you into the vine, nor has a pious love

¹ 1 John iv. 7.

² St. John xv. 4.

cemented the union. Rather you resemble another sort of branches, of which his own words have declared the awful fate. "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered, and men gather them and cast them into the fire; and they are burned¹." Oh tremble at the fate of the unprofitable Christian. Ponder well the awful warning. What proof do you give, that Christ dwells in you, and you in Him? Is your life the result of such an union? Is your heart entirely devoted to Him? You profess to be Christians: but, with too many it is Christianity only in name. You intend perhaps to be more devoted to Christ. But you never execute what you intend. From Sabbath to Sabbath you go after your idols: and the world, or the flesh, or the devil, gains that heart, which should be united to its pardoning and converting God.

2. For consider, in the second place, the view not implied, but expressed in the text, of this union with Christ. "He that

¹ St. John xv. 6.

keepeth his commandments, dwelleth in him, and he in him." His grace enables the believer thus to abound before him in all holiness. It is only by virtue of this union that the Christian can keep the commandments of his Lord. And while he keeps them through Christ, his keeping of them is the sure test of his saving interest in the mercies of his Lord. How many vain pretences are swept away by this single test ! How is our fancied gold found to be mere dross, when this touchstone is applied to it ! How is our fancied wheat proved to be mere chaff, when this winnowing fan is employed to separate the precious grain ! Do you complain of obscurities in the word of God ? Does your proud reason revolt from its mysteries, and do its spiritualizing doctrines and precepts cause the hypocrite, the half-Christian, the lover of himself and of the world, to go away offended ? Are any of you shocked to find, that your life is rather the life of a heathen, than of a Christian ? It is because you have not sought by a true faith, nor obtained through the Spirit, an union with

your Lord. If your faith were the faith of the heart, and you were in earnest about salvation, the prayer of faith, which in scriptural language *removes mountains*, would remove all stumbling-blocks out of your way. You would ask, and it would be given you : you would seek, and find : you would knock, and it would be opened to you¹. The Lord Jesus did not resemble the proud Pharisee, who excluded them that were entering in. His invitation is as general as his promise is consoling. "Come unto me, *all* ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me²." Then you will dwell in Christ, and Christ in you : and you will give full proof of the union, by keeping his commandments. When you see the self-denying and faithful Christian, animated by a true faith, burning with a pure love, and sustained by a joyful hope ; when you see him performing all his duties with a Christian spirit ; when you see him overcoming

¹ St. Matt. vii. 7.

² St. Matt. x. 28, 29.

temptation with a firm mind, and bearing adversity with a patient one ; when you see him meek and gentle toward all men, to-day, and every day loving and serving his God through Christ, and seeking strength to do so by his attendance on public ordinances, and on the appointed means of grace ; when the whole conduct and conversation manifest a spirit not of this world, when the Bible is his favourite book, not for cavilling, but for instruction in righteousness, and the house of God sought by him, and Christ's body and blood in their sacramental emblems, hungered and thirsted after, when the life is consistent with the profession, and the heart is full of desire to obey the commandments of the Lord, could you possibly say of such an one, that his own arm had gotten this victory over himself? No. "By the grace of God, I am what I am," said St. Paul. By virtue of his union with Christ, the believer keeps his commandments ; and hence the joyful assurance is given to his conscience, that "he dwelleth in Christ, and Christ in him."

Let the attainment of this divine temper be the object of our unwearied solicitude. Activity in business is not inconsistent with fervour in the religious spirit. An Apostle has united them together in beautiful harmony: "Not slothful in business," he says, "fervent in spirit;" and he adds, "serving the Lord;" as if to show that the honour of the Lord, and the duty of the follower, could be manifested both in the industrious habits, and the fervent zeal. The true Christian, who through Christ keeps all the commandments, is the best fitted, and the best enabled to "use this world, so as not to abuse it." He uses it to perform its duties; he uses it to conquer its temptations; he uses it to bear its sorrows. But never, and in no instance is he enslaved to it. The honour of God is always uppermost in his thoughts, the faith of Christ his animating principle, and love of the brethren the motive to many a benevolent, and many a self-denying act. Above all, faith unites him with Christ: and he "can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth him." He car-

ries about with him a body of sin. He knows, better than other men do theirs, the plague of his own heart; but through Christ he is striving against sin, and subduing every tendency to it, and every day he becomes more and more a conqueror, through the Lord who loves him. Persevere, O faithful Christian, "be not weary in well-doing;" "cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward¹." Go on, manfully go on, bearing the burden and heat of the day, mortifying your evil propensities, discharging your several duties, as unto the Lord; and, verily that gracious Lord will always sustain you. The prayer of the heart he will listen to from his highest throne. The groanings of your humble and contrite heart he will mercifully hear. *All they that hope in him shall not be ashamed*². Give up yourselves to his guidance. He will order your steps aright. By day and by night, live to a gracious God and to a loving Saviour; and the Lord Jehovah,

¹ Heb. x. 35.² Ps. xxv. 2.

the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of his people, will be to you an all-covering shield, and “no good thing shall he withhold from them who lead a godly life¹,” in the strength of Christ Jesus their Lord.

¹ Ps. lxxxiv. 12.

SERMON XI.

THE GOSPEL HID IN ITS SAVING AND HEART-
CONSTRAINING POWER IN THEM THAT ARE
L O S T.

2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

“ If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”

IN the verses preceding the text, the Apostle describes the course pursued by himself, and his brethren in the ministry, for the purpose of disclosing to the world the glorious truths of the Gospel. He speaks of their perseverance. *We faint not.* He speaks of their freedom from all sinister and self-seeking purposes. *They*

neither walked in craftiness, nor handled the word of God deceitfully. They declared the truth as God by his Spirit had revealed it to them. Their personal characters were beyond reproach. They could appeal to the consciences of their hearers, and inquire of those consciences, wherein the word which they preached, or the behaviour which they manifested, showed them to be other than preachers of the truth. They thus commended *themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*

A religion thus made known to the world, deserved to be favourably received, and faithfully attended to. It carried every mark of truth and sanctity ; it came recommended by its own intrinsic excellence. It afforded a practical proof of its value by the influence which it possessed on the lives of its preachers.

But by some it was not received, from some it was hidden. Though beaming forth the light of Divine truth, it could not penetrate into the hearts of some. Some inward obstacle stood in its way, some

blindness had covered the eyes of the understanding. Some blindness, more deeply seated, had prevented the heart from feeling it. *Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness, while to them who were called, the same Christ was the wisdom of God, and the power of God*¹.

Wherein lies the difference, and what was the cause of the difference? How is it that man will not savingly receive the religion so suited to sinners? How is it, that some of us will not embrace with the whole heart those doctrines, which at once speak peace to the soul, and are the instruments in the hands of the Holy Spirit, of making us new creatures in Christ? The Apostle, in the text, assigns the fatal cause. And the reasons which he assigns, and the explanations which he gives, are calculated to read to all professing Christians a most useful lesson. It is a lesson suited to all times, not to the Apostle's times alone, but to all times, to our times equally with

¹ 1 Cor. i. 23, 24.

others. We do not see professing Christians, so deeply impressed with the essential doctrines of our faith as they should be. We do not see them sensible of the sinfulness, and deep depravity of their nature, nor of the necessity of sanctification by the Holy Spirit, to qualify it for heaven. We do not see them setting a due value (an *inestimable* one our Church esteems it,) on the redemption by Christ Jesus. We do not see them feeling the power of indwelling sin, and the necessity of striving perpetually against it. How few acknowledge, that the love of God is the first duty of the Christian, and how fewer feel that it "is shed abroad in our hearts only by the power of the Holy Ghost!" Justification by faith alone is no favourite with the proud, the self-conceited, and self-righteous. The entire sanctification of our nature through the Spirit, has no charms for the sensual, the debauched, and the impure. All the distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel! seem hid from the man of this world; and even professing Christians walk their round of exterior duties without heart-

felt faith and piety, and are in no respect different from the heathen around them, except as worldly motives operate to the prevention of crime.

How can any minister of the Gospel be otherwise than alarmed, lest any of his congregation, satisfied with a mere outward and formal show of Christianity, should persist in a state so dangerous to the salvation of their souls? How should he fear, lest the pearl of great price should be lost by them, because they will not search for it, “as for hid treasure?”

I propose, my brethren, in the present discourse, to ground my observations on the declaration made in the text, and before I apply them to our particular cases, to lay before you the following propositions, as clearly deducible from it.

1. The Gospel, though a glorious Gospel, though it be a light proceeding from Christ, the image of God, is yet hid from some. The words of the Apostle infer that this is the case, for he says, *if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost*,—a plain proof that it is hid. The Apostle would not have

made the supposition, if it had been an impossible one ; he states the matter hypothetically ; but still he states it as a matter founded on fact. And is not our Gospel hid in these days from multitudes around us ? I speak not of the heathen, who live in utter disregard of their souls, and seek not the mercies of God through a Redeeming Saviour, as their refuge from the wrath to come. I speak not of the cavilling sceptic, or flippant scorner, who would undermine the faith of others by a sneer or a jest, and who sport their objections in order to show their fancied acuteness, and who have never sought assurance of faith in the proper and consistent way. The Gospel is indeed awfully hid from this last-named description of persons, because they stumble at the very threshold. They set up reason as their idol, as if the understanding of man were able to comprehend the deep things of God. I speak, my brethren, of persons who profess to believe the Gospel, who are seen in our public places of worship, who go through the

forms of godliness, and seem to be Christians, at least in outward profession.

Can the Gospel be hid from *them*, you will ask? Can it be possible that *they* should be strangers to what they profess to believe and avow? It is not only possible—it is true. It is a melancholy fact. It is hid from them, because it is not felt by them in their hearts. It is hid from them, because it is not the only rule they walk by, nor are its principles the only principles which actuate them. It is certain, that “as our thoughts are, such must be our character.” Our thoughts are not habitually occupied with it. It is not the habitual influencer of our thoughts, and therefore our character cannot be that of true Gospel believers and followers. The deep, total, universal depravity of our nature, and the necessity of its regeneration by the Holy Spirit—these doctrines form the groundwork of the Christian faith. And what effect must these doctrines possess on the heart of a believer in them? The deepest self-abasement, the profoundest humility,

and the most ardent lifting up of the 'soul to God, must be the effect of them on our souls. Is this the case? Are not pride and self-complacency the character of the unsanctified world? Are not self-dependence, and a leaning on his own understanding, favourite qualities with the unregenerate Christian? He walks proudly before man, and assuredly walks not humbly with his God. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—a faith so absolute and entire, so reaching to every motive and governing every action, as to enable a true Christian to say, that his life is passed in the faith of the Son of God; a faith so universal in its influence, as to produce a subjection of every thought to the obedience of Christ; this is the essential of the Gospel—its life and its soul—its sinews, blood, flesh, and bones. Is this the character of the merely professing Christian world? If it be not our character, and if we are not striving to attain to it, with the help of God's Spirit, the Gospel is hid from us. It is not hid from our knowledge, for these things are often sounded in our ears. We

cannot be ignorant of them. It is hid from our hearts. We do not feel it practically and actually ; its influence on the inner man is a hidden mystery, into which our unsanctified hearts cannot penetrate. The love of God, the supreme love of God, the love of him with the whole heart ; this is another paramount Gospel obligation. Is this too a hidden mystery from an unsanctified world ? Every child that learns his catechism knows it with his head ; but it is hidden from all but the spiritual man, who is seeking to be complete in Christ. Is God, my brethren, according to the powerful expression of a most splendid modern writer¹, “the home” of your mind ? —that is, when your thoughts are turned from him, and your cares and affections directed to other things, do you feel as if you were living among utter strangers ? And when your thoughts, and affections, are turned to God, do you feel as if you were at home ; and that home the centre of all your thoughts and cares, the seat of

¹ Robert Hall.

every joy, the solace of your hearts, your only resting-place in a world of sorrow and vicissitude? The love of Christ, union with him, dwelling in him and he in you, receiving fresh manifestations of his kindness, and living entirely to him; this is assuredly a hidden Gospel to the worldly man, the unsanctified and the impure. Yet it is the Gospel, it is an essential part of the Gospel. Is this hid from us? I repeat again, so hid from us, as that we are strangers to its inward and constraining power over us. Then again, my brethren, must not the Gospel be hid from us—must we not be strangers to it, and must it not be, that “this secret of the Lord,” according to the psalmist’s expression, is not among us, when we neither read it, nor meditate on it, nor make it the subject of our habitual musings and reflections? Were this question put by an inquiring angel to all of us in this congregation, How many of you have read the Gospel narratives, how many the Apostolic Epistles? which of you have been charmed and edified by the interesting history of

the early church, as transmitted to us by the inspired historian of the Acts of the Apostles? Were this question put to us, what answer should we make to the heavenly inquirer? Would our consciences bring a blush on our cheeks, if such a question were proposed to us? "It is observable," remarks the writer above referred to, "that the *only* persons who are inattentive to their own sacred books, are to be found among Christians. Mahomedans commit large portions of the Koran to memory; the Jews regard the Old Testament with reverence; the Hindoo Bramins are enthusiastically attached to their Shaster; while Christians alone neglect their Bible." And the reason is, that the Scriptures are so much more spiritual than the religious books received by others; they afford so little scope for mere amusement or self-complacency; they place the reader close with God; they withdraw him from "the things which are seen and are temporal," and fix him among "the things which are unseen and are eternal;" they disclose to his view at once

the secret evils of his own condition, and the awful purity of that Being with whom he has to do. No wonder the ungodly man hates their light, neither comes to their light, but retires from it further and further into the shades of guilt and ignorance. This is the last test which I mention, whereby we must prove to ourselves whether our Gospel be hid from us. Hid it must be from us, if we hide ourselves from it. We must be ignorant of its power unto salvation, when we do not use it as the instituted means, under God's Spirit, of making ourselves wise unto the saving of our souls.

I have now, my brethren, enumerated a few instances, whereby we may endeavour to ascertain, by much and frequent self-searching, whether our Gospel be hid from any of us ; hid from us not in name, but in its spirit and its power. When we go on to consider the cause which the Apostle assigns for this lamentable putting away of the Gospel from us, we must see the necessity of taking good heed to ourselves, lest any of us should in any way

approach to a state so full of danger and of alarm.

1st. It is hid to them that are lost. Lost we all are by nature ; ruined and undone is every child of Adam as he comes into the world, and lost we continue to be, both to God and heaven, until we are "found in Christ" and receive a spiritual life from him. The Gospel is the grand and all-important and all-comprehensive remedy, whereby God has designed to rectify all the disorders of his rational and moral creation. It is a restorative process, the means of restoring a race of intellectual and immortal beings to the favour of the Almighty Father of the universe. To obtain this end, the Gospel must not only be spread and known, and nominally believed ; the disorder is in our hearts, and all their affections, and *there* must the remedy be applied. The understanding of man may, through the fall of Adam, be a wreck, but still it is a wreck, which, even in its ruins, shows the infinite wisdom that formed it. But it is in the heart as the seat of all our affections, as the fountain of feeling, of

principle and action ; it is there that the mighty ruin has been most awful and most wasteful. The heart without the grace of God is at enmity with God, is dead in sin, and “as to every good work,” that is *good* in the sight of God, awfully “reprobate.” Now, brethren, unless through the Gospel as the means, and through the Holy Spirit as the agent, we are savingly converted and brought to God through Christ, we are still lost creatures. We are ruined, spiritually and eternally ruined. Let the Gospel be brought home to your hearts, and be in the progress to an entire sway over every thought and affection, then it becomes known to you. Then it is not hid ; then you begin the course to salvation. Should it be hid from you, and you strangers to its restoring power, you are lost, my brethren, now and for ever.

2nd. *If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of many who believe not, lest the light of the Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.* These words complete

the awful description. Oh, what an enemy we have to our souls; what a restless foe for ever at war with our peace and salvation! Satan is the god of this world, because it is in this world only that he rules, and by means of this world leads captive the unsanctified part of it. Observe the manner in which he works on us to prevent our saving acceptance of Gospel truth. He blinds the minds of them that believe not. As the Spirit of God opens the eyes of the understanding in them who seek the salvation of their souls, so Satan in opposition to our Lord endeavours to blind them. Numerous are the ways by which he effects his deadly purpose. Are we by nature self-conceited, highly opinionative and self-dependent? He blinds our minds to be idolizers of ourselves. Are we bent on worldly gain, and worldly honour, and worldly wealth? He blinds our minds by prevailing covetousness and ambition. Are we by nature prone to the love of ease and pleasure? By indolence and voluptuousness he works in us a total blindness of heart. And when we reflect, painfully

reflect, how many thus barter their souls for the things of this world, we cannot be too earnest, my brethren, in prayer to God for the gracious influence of his Spirit, that his Gospel may no longer be a hidden Gospel from us. We cannot pray too often or too fervently, that God by the teaching of his Spirit may put the truths of his holy word into our minds and "write them in our hearts." Thus taught of God, thus feeling the witness of his Spirit within us, we shall go on from strength to strength; God will be to us our God, the God of our salvation, and we shall be to him a people. We shall "know him from the least to the greatest." "He will be merciful to our unrighteousness, and our sins and our iniquities he will remember no more¹."

A few words more, and I have done. Let us not part, brethren, this day without carrying home on our consciences and our hearts, some most salutary resolutions. Be not content with outward duties only. Be not satisfied with the husks of a mere

¹ Heb. viii. 12.

outward profession. In our Father's house there is "bread enough and to spare." Evermore seek "that bread, which came down from heaven and giveth life unto the world¹." Oh that Christ could thus be formed in your hearts, and his glorious Gospel shine into them with all its mighty and internally operating and resplendent beams! This saving knowledge, thus planted by God's Spirit within you, would bear abundant fruits both of outward and of inward holiness. You would not be the hearers of the word only; you would be doers of it also. Looking perpetually into the mirror of the Gospel, from whence the adorable perfections of the great God and the Saviour Jesus Christ are for ever reflected, you would be transformed into their image: the light which issues from the glorious Gospel would be a lamp to lighten all your paths in this changing, vain, and unsettled world. The prophetic image would be realized in our case; for the light of the Gospel, thus illuminating our ways,

¹ St. John vi. 33.

would exceed in brightness the light of the material sun, even though it were increased sevenfold. *Moreover the light of the moon, says the prophet, shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound*¹.

¹ Is. xxx. 26.

SERMON XII.

THE EVIL SPIRIT RETURNING TO THE HOUSE SWEPT AND GARNISHED.

ST. LUKE xi. 24, 25, 26.

“ When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places seeking rest : and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there ; and the last state of that man is worse than the first.”

THE passage of Scripture, in which our Lord makes this declaration to his followers, is perhaps among the most awful in the sacred volume. It seems to be intended, not for them who have thrown off all religious and moral restraints, and who may therefore be considered as completely

under the power of Satanic influence ; it would appear to be designed as a warning to such, as seek only a partial reformation, while the heart is unchanged—to such, in short, as aim only at specious appearances, while all within is unsound, hollow, and deceitful.

In order to arrive at the true meaning of the text, it will be necessary to consider, somewhat at large, the whole passage in which it occurs.

Jesus, we read, was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. That is, the evil spirit which had entered into the person, had deprived him of the use of the organs of speech. *And it came to pass when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake ; and the people wondered.* No one denied the fact. No one presumed to contradict the persuasion at that time prevalent, that the possession of the souls and bodies of man by devils was an acknowledged truth. Some present, the Scribes and Pharisees, alarmed at the power and influence which such miracles would give to our Lord over the minds of the common people, attempted

to counteract the impression in this way: "He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils." This strange perversion of truth our Lord withstands by an argument irresistible in its nature, and powerful in its bearings on more points than one. "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falleth." I could, my brethren, if time permitted me, stop at this course of his argument, and lift up my voice like a trumpet against division in sentiment and conduct among them who walk in the house of God as friends. How great, how incalculable have been the mischiefs, which have followed divisions and dissensions in kingdoms, communities, and families! How miserable the detail of woes, which have ensued, when the evil spirit of discord has entered into the Christian Church, and rent the seamless garment of Christ! How much is it to be deplored, when even small associations of Christians, united, or which should be united, for the purposes of advancing the moral and spiritual good of others, suffer one cause or

another to produce disunion among them, and thus obstruct the very object which all are anxious to advance! Oh let us, I implore you, check the very first beginnings of strife! *A house divided against itself falleth.* Our great enemy loves to sow the seeds of discord. Nor is his kingdom of darkness ever more effectually promoted, than when these noxious tares, which he sows in the midst of the wheat, either choke the good grain or materially lessen the harvest, in which it would otherwise terminate. But to proceed.

Our Lord answers the cavil by hinting that the miracles wrought by him did not serve the interests of Satan's kingdom. Could the devil therefore aid in advancing that, whereby his own cause would be obstructed? Would he assist the Saviour in casting out devils, when the object for which our Lord cast them out, was the destruction of his power? Would he suffer "his armour to be taken" from him, and "his spoils divided," unless "a stronger than he had come upon him, and overcome him?"

Jesus then proceeds to the remarkable doctrine inculcated in the text. *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest: and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house, whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first.* The doctrine herein contained proves to us that evil spirits are at work for the destruction of the souls of men, that they find no rest except they are engaged in this destruction; and that unless the heart of the professing Christian is thoroughly cleansed and purified through the Spirit of God, an avenue is opened to greater incursions of evil, which render the last state of the sinner worse than the first, and inevitably plunge him in ruin beyond recovery and beyond repair.

An illustration of these several topics will, with the divine blessing, form the subject of the following discourse.

First then with respect to demoniacal possessions. Every reader of the Gospels perpetually meets therein with instances of the existence of evil spirits, and of their influences on the bodies and souls of men. This is not a matter of theory or of speculation. It is utterly impossible to refine the fact away. We may adopt fanciful notions, and in the pride of the human heart raise upon these flimsy foundations theories as unsubstantial as they; but what says the word of God? This is the infallible criterion of the soundness or unsoundness of our opinions. Do not the Scriptures speak, (and if language ever be definite,) do they not speak definitely and clearly of devils having entered into, and of their being expelled out of, the bodies of men? When the miserable object, with whom our Lord met among the tombs¹, so fierce, so powerful in strength, and furious in temper, that no man could tame him, that even the fetters with which his friends attempted to bind him, were broken in pieces by his supernatural strength—

¹. St. Mark v. 2—17.

when this wretched being, this outcast from society, saw our Lord, he addressed language to him, which could not have been derived from his own reasonings. It must have been suggested to his mind by a higher spirit than his own. *The Son of the Most High God*, was an epithet which must have been suggested to him by one of those evil spirits, who "believe while they tremble¹." The Evangelist speaks of the maniac as possessed by an evil spirit. The command given by our Lord was, *Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit*. Can madness be communicated by man to the irrational animal? On this occasion a great herd of swine were impelled by the evil spirits to a deed of self-destruction. Two thousand swine rushing voluntarily (as it would seem) into the sea, and drowned in the waters, afford an awful proof of the destructive power possessed by those malignant but superior beings. Call to mind St. Paul's memorable injunction, suited to all countries and to all times, that "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but

¹ St. James ii. 19.

against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world; against spiritual wickedness in high places¹." Can this wrestling be a bodily wrestling? Can it be our fighting hand in hand with foes who attack the body? No, my brethren, it is the soul which they attack. It is the soul, whose powers of perception they destroy, and into which they insinuate themselves, and all their evil propensities. It is a spiritual wrestling with spiritual foes; an internal warfare with enemies who do inward mischief, and work inward ruin. Go, ye half-philosophers and vain reasoners, go and lay your proud imaginations at the feet of God's unerring word. Look on the maniac, when, with self-gratulation, he has wrought some work of destruction; a fiend-like appearance is said to be given to the aspect. We hear and read of instances of madness; the cause of it remains unknown; the cure of it always difficult, and sometimes impossible:

¹ Ephes. vi. 12.

Who among us can be prepared to say, that an evil spirit has not destroyed the faculties of the madman? Look at a man under the strong impulses of ungovernable anger; does he not often look as if an evil spirit possessed him? Look at some who act with a studied perversion of every moral and religious feeling; may not the power of the evil one be considered as influencing their unhappy souls? Look at the furiously obstinate temper, which no entreaties can persuade, no reasonings convince, no conciliation soften. Sure I am that not one of us can presume to say, that these effects, and effects similar to these, cannot be produced on the souls of men by *the rulers of the darkness of this world*. What is the preparation which St. Paul exhorts us to make for resisting these invisible foes? Is not the whole of it an internal preparation? Are not the remedies such as apply only to the spiritual part within us? Is not faith, is not the word of God, an armour which the soul only can wear? The foe therefore is within

us ; the mischief done by him is mischief done to the soul ; the means of preventing it are mental, spiritual, internal.

2. *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man*, says our Lord, *he*, that is, the unclean spirit, *walketh through dry places, seeking rest*. I do not conceive that this description is given merely to fill up the outlines of the picture. I conceive, that it is thrown in by infinite wisdom for the purpose of showing, that if happily some evil spirit has been expelled from us by means of God's blessing and the Holy Spirit's help on our inward wrestling, he is always restless until he can return into us. And an awful warning is hereby conveyed, that all who feel themselves enabled to conquer any evil propensity within them, should always watch unto prayer, and guard with vigilance against the return of the same. There they are most likely to fall ; there is the avenue through which evil can enter ; there is the door, of which the barriers and the bolts should be always fast, because through it, the evil spirit, "seeking rest and finding none," will return with in-

creased violence, and more destructive mischief.

3. I proceed, in the third place, to the description of the soul of man, when it is most liable to these augmented incursions of evil, on which it becomes us all to dwell with serious meditation, and a watchful, praying spirit.

It would appear that the warning was meant for the Scribes and Pharisees more than for publicans and harlots; that is, more for persons who make a religious profession, than for them who have thrown off all religious restraints, and *are sold under sin*. Remember that it was to Scribes and Pharisees, to professors of great outward sanctity and seeming piety, that our Lord directed the indignant but awful warning. "When he cometh," Jesus says, that is, when the unclean spirit returns to the house whence he came out, when some evil temper or evil lust, either suggested by the sinner's evil nature, or prompted by a secret foe within him, returns to the heart which it had occupied, "he findeth it swept and garnished." Our

Lord's language is always plain and familiar, and though his discourses contain doctrines which "made foolish the wisdom of this world," and though they contain precepts, which are in themselves wisdom among them that are perfect, yet they were couched in language intelligible to the meanest capacities. All would understand what was meant by "a house swept and a house garnished." The sweepings meant the removal of light offences, the dust and rubbish of the spiritual life. They meant the tithing "of mint and anise and cummin," the attention to trivial matters, the insisting on unessential points. The house garnished meant the outward show, the semblance of religion, the mere profession, the outward form calculated to attract notice and please the sight. Does the evil spirit find the house thoroughly and completely washed and furnished? Does he find every corner, nay every crevice, thoroughly cleansed? No. He finds only the dust swept away, and outward ornaments unsparingly used. This was the house into which he entered. Into this

house he came accompanied with seven other spirits, more wicked than himself.

Awful was the warning to mere outward professors of religion in those days; and awful is it also in every succeeding age of the Church. Awful is it, my brethren, both to you and to me. A thorough, entire sanctification of the heart is the course here recommended to them who bear the name of Christ; not the sweeping lightly and superficially of our inward man, but a complete, deep, internal, heart-reformation; not a dependence on outward forms and ceremonies, the garniture of religion, but that creation of a new heart within us, and renewal of a right spirit, which constitutes vital godliness, and to which a true and godly repentance will for Christ's sake lead the true believer.

How many of us, who feel the mischief, the temporal mischief, arising from past sins and vices, do undertake, and sometimes successfully, to commence a new course of conduct! Is it done under the constraining love of Christ? is it done in entire dependence on the help and guidance

of the Spirit? No. It is only an outward change. It is the mere garnishing of the outward man. The heart remains "deceitful and desperately wicked," as it was before. No transforming influences are felt there. None of the new-creating power of the Holy Spirit is felt within. This is not regeneration, this is not being born again, this is not heart-reformation, this is not being "purged from dead works to serve the living God." It is lip-religion; it is the surface of piety; it is the mere sweeping of that house, which Satan leaves only to enter again. Sorrow for sin, when sin brings punishment upon us, may be only an outward garnishing. It may be only "a sorrow of the world working death." That only is true repentance, which is accompanied with a change of heart, and is followed by an entire change of life. That only is repentance in the sight of God which, being wrought within us, through his Spirit, and blessed with his blessing, ends through the same Spirit and blessing in that "peace of God which passeth all understanding."

The last subject for consideration is the awful end of all specious reformatations, all merely outward changes, where the heart remains unchanged. *Then goeth he, says our Lord, and taketh to him seven other wicked spirits, and they enter in and dwell there, and the last state of that man is worse than the first.* A tremendous description! but bear witness to its truth all ye mere outward changes, where the heart still remains dead in trespasses and sins. Bear witness all ye partial reformatations; which end, when the first impulse is gone, in increased depravity. Let the sick-bed bear its witness, when the sinner has swept the house and garnished it; that is, when the heart has not undergone the vital change. Health returns, strength returns, and with them the seven evil spirits return; that is, increased depravity, hopeless efforts, an augmented descent into the abyss of destruction. *The hypocrite's hope, says the wise man, shall perish*¹; and never have I seen these merely outward changes, these hypo-

¹ Job viii. 13.

critical professions end in any thing but promise and profession, without the deed and the truth. The man is a hypocrite not only to his God but to himself. He has fancied himself secure, and has thereby imposed on himself. But months, nay years pass, and the sinner still continues, if not devoted to the same sin as before, yet still unchanged towards his God, giving up one sin but following another, not sinning in the same way as before, but sinning with as high a hand as ever against his God. The progressions of virtue and godliness are no less striking than the retrograde motions of sin and ungodliness. When we do not advance in holiness, we recede from it; and when we make our steps down to sin and misery, we make them with so accelerated a motion, as to justify the Apostle's description : *evil men wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived*¹. *The last state of all hypocrites and dissemblers with their God is worse than the first.*

¹ 2 Timothy iii. 13.

What remains then, my brethren, but that we all apply to our hearts and consciences the awful warning of the text. When I read of Peter, denying his Lord, and going out and weeping bitterly; when I see him after our Lord's ascension, a new man in Christ Jesus, living not "unto himself but unto Christ who had died for him," I see an image of true repentance, of godly sorrow. When I read of Judas repenting him of his wickedness, confessing his sin, returning the guilty bribe, and see him in despair of mercy, committing self-murder, I discern an image of that worldly sorrow which worketh death. Wherein lay the difference? The heart of one Apostle was changed; the heart of the other was not. Peter had purified and cleansed his heart; that is, he had done so, the Holy Spirit enabling him so to do; "God had given him repentance unto life." Judas had swept and garnished the house; he had swept the bribe into the hands of them who gave it, and garnished himself with a mere acknowledgment of our Lord's innocency. The out-

ward act, the outward speech seemed plausible in the eye of man, but the inner man was unchanged, the heart was unsubdued. God and God's Spirit had not taken possession of it, the hope of mercy had not soothed it, the assurance of pardon had neither sustained nor gladdened it. The evil spirit returned with despair, reckless despair, a wounded conscience and a hopeless condition. His last state became worse than the first; and self-murder was the end of his fatal career.

O let our prayer to God through Christ be: *Make me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me*¹. *Keep thy servant from presumptuous sins. Cleanse thou me from my secret faults*². Keep me *undefiled from the great offence*, that offence which makes us enemies to our Lord, from falseness to our saving God and Father. Was Paul satisfied with mere sweeping, mere garnishing of the house, which Satan had left? No! He went to the root of

¹ Ps. li. 10.² Ibid. xix. 12, 13.

the evil : he prayed, he sought retirement; he communed with his God. Having obtained help from God, he commenced his course of persevering faithfulness, and habitual self-denial : he sought a true faith in the Son of God, and the life which he henceforward led, he spent in that constant faith : he prayed for grace, and to that grace he thankfully attributed his proficiency in the Christian life. : *I am what I am.* He “laboured more abundantly than they all,” not only in preaching the Gospel ; he kept under his body and brought it into subjection ¹. Prayer was the constant sustainer of this true servant of the Lord. Always “praying with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto.” He “fought a good fight,” but a fight it was, an outward and inward warfare, in which he endured “hardness as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.” He finished his course, but the course which he ran was not as uncertainly; his was a sure and steadfast hope, a joy and peace in believ-

¹ 1 Cor. ix. 27.

ing, which *they* only can obtain who have the witness of their sincerity within themselves. The crown of righteousness was laid up for him ; “ God, even the righteous judge, will give it at his appearing ;” and abundant will be our recompense, my brethren, if, after his example, and with the same assisting Spirit of our God within us, we “ wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivers us from the wrath to come¹.”

¹ 1 Thess. i. 10.

SERMON XIII.

THE VAIL ON THE HEART.

2 COR. iii. 15, 16.

“ But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. Nevertheless, when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away.”

THE event in the history of the Israelites, which gave occasion to the peculiar language thus used by St. Paul, is interesting in its nature as well as in the practical lessons arising from it. It is well known to all readers of the Old Testament, that the two tables, on which the finger of God (to use the words of Scripture) had written the ten commandments, had been broken by Moses. It was on occasion of a great

and public sin committed by the people of God, that their favoured lawgiver resorted to this method of showing his indignation at their behaviour. However, God was pleased to renew his covenant with his people, and directed that two new tables of stone should be hewn out for receiving his written law, as contained in the ten commandments. On this occasion Moses continued on Mount Sinai forty days and forty nights, "neither eating bread nor drinking water." I do not imagine that any infidel or deistical scorner is in this congregation; if there be, let him not be surprised to hear of these wonderful occurrences in the Jewish history. No events in ancient history are better authenticated than those which are contained in the Old Testament. We have a people residing among us, (as they reside in all lands,) who may be said to be keepers of the ancient oracles of God. All their civil and political institutions, all that distinguishes them as a people, all the ceremonies which mark them as a religious people, are found in the Old Testament. From age to age, from generation to genera-

tion, these ceremonies have been observed ; and, scattered as the people are through the whole known world, they all, every where, and under every government, appeal to their Bible as the source from which all their institutions have been derived. There they are recorded, and from thence they are perpetually testifying, that the people who thus observe them, were the very people selected by God to preserve the remembrance of such ceremonies, and to bear in every age their testimony to the truth of the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Never would any people have been so zealous for the law of their fathers, if they had not been convinced that such a law was derived from God.

On the return of Moses from Mount Sinai, with the two tables of testimony in his hands, after having been admitted into the immediate presence of God, his face was discovered to have assumed a bright and glorious appearance. Even Aaron, and no wonder the children of Israel was afraid to look on it—afraid to come nigh him. He repeated to the

whole congregation all the commandments spoken to him by the Lord in Mount Sinai, and during this solemn communication of the revealed law of God to the people, he put a vail on his face. This continued to be his practice, as long as he was employed in making known to them the will of God. The circumstance thus distinctly recorded, is justly thought to have been highly emblematic. It was emblematic, in the first place, of the obscurity attending this earlier revelation. It showed that, behind the vail of a carnal commandment, a spiritual law was hidden; that behind the vail of types and figures, behind the vail of an earthly tabernacle and of a changeable priesthood, was concealed the redemption of a whole world from sin and death by a priest abiding for ever, and entering with his own precious blood behind the vail into a temple made without hands. The vail was emblematic also of another, and, to human pride, a mortifying circumstance. It was an emblem of that vail, that covering, nay that obscurity, which carnal mindedness and

the pride of man's corrupt heart, have thrown on spiritual things. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned, and carnal mindedness is like a vail thrown before them, and hiding them from the men of the world.

It is in allusion to the vail thus put by Moses on his face, while he was speaking to the children of Israel, that St. Paul, uses the mode of speaking adopted by him in the text, and in the verses connected with it. The Apostle asserts that "even until this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart." They cannot see beyond it, nor understand him of whom their law and prophets did write. Their eyes are covered; their minds are blinded. They cannot discern, that he of whom Moses wrote is now the acknowledged Saviour, the priest and prophet and king of a regenerate and redeemed world. "Blindness has happened in part to them," says St. Paul, that is, not to the whole nation, for many thousands of Jews did believe and were incorporated into the Christian Church, merged and sunk in

name, and in all the marks of distinction into the Christian fold. But this blindness will be as transitory as it is partial. This "blindness in part, as St. Paul asserts, is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in, and so all Israel shall be saved ¹." None of us can be so decided interpreters of prophecy as to say that this event is approaching fast. But the signs of the times are such as to excite in the Christian believer some hope, that the extended conversion of the Gentile nations, and the gathering into the Christian Church of the ancient people of God, may probably be events not far distant from us.

I propose, my brethren, with the divine blessing, to apply the circumstances to which I have turned your attention to our mutual benefit. I shall not apply the subject to any remarks on unfulfilled prophecy; I shall endeavour to apply them to a highly practical and spiritual purpose.

¹ Rom. xi. 25, 26.

1. When we hear or read the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and more especially the prophecies, we are astonished to find that the Jews, who receive those Scriptures as a revelation from God, should reject Jesus Christ as their Messiah. Every Christian, qualified to form an opinion on the subject, looks on this blindness of the children of Israel as utterly unwarrantable—as resting on no foundation either of truth or of probability. We wonder to see evidence, so irresistible in our estimation, resisted by a people, who acknowledge that a Saviour was always expected by their nation, and who still cling to the hope, that in time he will be revealed. St. Paul accounts for this continued incredulity, by attributing it to “the vail which is upon their heart.” It is not that their understandings cannot be convinced; their hearts resist the truth. May not the Christian preacher humbly, but confidently adopt the language of the great Apostle, and say, *Thou art incurable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest; for wherein thou judgest another,*

*thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things*¹. Is there not a vail upon the heart of many a Christian, when he hears or reads the Gospel of Jesus Christ? May not the Jew turn round on the nominal Christian, and say, Believest thou the prophets, and the Gospel, which thou sayest that those prophets foretold? "I know that thou believest." Where then is thy corresponding behaviour? Were he inclined or competent to pursue his searching inquiry into every part of Christian duty, as it respects faith and morals, would he not say, that a vail must be upon our hearts? How unlike to the Christian whom the Gospel describes, would he say, is the Christian whom I meet with every day! I should expect in a Gospel believer such a devotedness of soul to the Saviour whom he receives, that I should almost expect to find him scarcely like a mortal man—a vail must be on thine heart—and although thou professest to believe in Christ as thy Saviour and thy Judge, neither

¹ Rom. ii. 1.

thy conversation, nor thy conduct, bespeaks sincerity in the profession.

Alas ! my brethren ! what reply could we make to the charge thus brought against us ? We could not plead ignorance as our excuse ; the Gospel of Christ is read to us every Sabbath-day ; the ministry of reconciliation is committed to an order of men set apart for the holy purpose ; “ necessity is laid on them to preach the Gospel, and woe be it unto us if by us the Gospel is not preached.” If the Gospel trumpet be not sounded by us, and they, to whom it should be sounded, take not warning, they die in their sins, but their blood is on our heads. But suppose the case to be otherwise with you, and the denunciations of Christ against your sins to be sounded in your ears ; suppose the thunders of heavenly wrath to be pointed at your worldliness and love of sin, and preference of yourselves to God and Christ, what excuse can you make for your habitual inattention to the solemn warning ? The vail must be upon your hearts.

What then is this vail, and whereby can

it be removed? Hear a warning, and receive an admonition from Jewish unbelief. *Because of unbelief, says St. Paul, they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou shalt be cut off*¹. I quote this passage of Scripture to convince you of the awful necessity imposed on professing Christians to examine well the sincerity of their faith, and of the behaviour which is the test of that faith. The vail which hid Christ from the Jews, and prevented them from acknowledging him as their Saviour, was carnal mindedness, a devotedness to worldly things, and an insensibility to spiritual things. The same vail hides him from our hearts. With our understandings we acknowledge him; nay, we are ready to

¹ Rom. xi. 20, 21, 22.

call him Lord, Lord. No covering conceals him from this assent of the lips, or of the head. It is when we are called on to "cut off the right hand, and pluck out the right eye;" it is when we are commanded to "take up our cross daily and follow him;" it is when he demands our whole heart, and would suffer no earthly object to interfere with his pre-eminence over it, it is then that the vail continues on us, unremoved and untaken away. We cannot give up the darling passion for him; we cannot struggle with our beloved propensities; we can make no sacrifices; we cannot endure the world's laugh, or scorn, or hatred. We cannot bear to be called precise, singular, and uncomplying; we will not have him, in short, to reign over us, our sole Lord and Master. Such a man's company, for instance, is pleasant to us; he is rich, and we must pay him every mark of respect. The conversation of another delights us; we forget his vices and his infidelity, when we are conversing with him. Is this the Christian whom St.

Paul exhorts to "withdraw from every brother that walketh disorderly¹?" Is this the Christian, whom the same Apostle instructs to "mind not high things, but to condescend to men of low estate²?" Must not a vail of carnal mindedness be on our hearts, when we thus refuse to be conformed in likeness to a lowly and unworldly Saviour?

Pride prevented the Jew from accepting the humble Jesus as the Messiah, whom his false views encouraged him to expect. Does not pride operate on the heart of the Christian in checking his obedience to the same holy Saviour? How many injunctions of our blessed Lord are there, which pride prevents us from obeying! Forgiveness of injuries we call a mean virtue. A lowly estimation of ourselves, discernible in our daily walk and conversation, is too degrading for us to entertain. Condescension to others is unworthy of us. This is the vail which covers the minds of many, and prompts to

¹ 2 Thess. iii. 6.

² Rom. xii. 16.

unbelief in the heart, even while, with our lips, we profess faith in him.

“Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him ¹?” was the question which the unbelieving Jew is known to have asked ; therefore, fashion was made by him the rule of his faith. Is this the vail which covers our hearts ? Are there any Christian duties neglected by us because they are unfashionable ? Are there any violations of Christian duty committed by us because we have in such violations fashion on our side ? Are we afraid of being called righteous overmuch because we show our conformity to true Christian faith by abstaining from fashionable sins and guarding against fashionable levities ?

The chief priests and Pharisees, Pilate knew, “had delivered him up for envy.” Does that unchristian feeling prevail in our hearts ? Does it prompt us to ill natured acts, and malicious words and spiteful looks ? Do we feel a pleasure in showing our contempt of others, or our

¹ John vii. 48.

unkind feelings towards them by any marked behaviour? Where is Christian charity when professing Christians thus have bitter envying and ill-nature in their hearts? They crucify the Lord of love afresh. He appointed mutual love as the test and sign of our being his disciples. He prayed for enemies, healed the wound inflicted on one of them, and checked in his Apostles every desire of returning evil for evil. By a contrary practice he is crucified afresh; and what is worse, he is wounded in the house of his friends.

If my limits would allow me, I could extend these analogies yet further; to doctrines as well as to duties. "We know not this man, whence he is," said the unbelieving Jew. We know not, says the nominal, self-righteous Christian, whence are derived the humbling declarations of our natural inbred corruption, of the necessity of an entire conversion from inward sin to inward and outward holiness, of salvation by grace alone, of being led by the Spirit and made thereby children of God. Doctrines, such as these, demanding the

entire subjection of the heart to the spiritual law of the Gospel, declaring that except we "be converted and become as little children, we cannot enter the kingdom of God;" doctrines, such as these, are humbling to our pride, painful to our covetousness and disgusting to our worldly mindedness. We know not whence they are, says the mere nominal Christian; for me they cannot be intended.

My brethren, the only remedy by which we can remove the carnal mindedness thus opposed to a full faith in the Lord Jesus is the same which will operate in the removal of Jewish unbelief. "When it," that is, the Jewish heart, "shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away." You see, brethren, your disease and its remedy. A conversion of your heart to God, turning to the Lord who bought you with an entireness of faith and a fulness of holy-love; this is the way, and the only way, for taking away that vail which hides from you the glory of the great Redeemer. Let "every thought be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ;" let your hearts

feel the value of a Saviour, and all your affections be centered in him as the Redeemer, "elect, precious," the giver of all spiritual grace and the author of everlasting life; thus turn to the Lord with that glow of delight which animated the saints of old, when they could exclaim, "Whom have I in heaven but thee; and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee¹;" *to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*; thus turn to the Lord with all your heart and soul, and mind and strength, and the vail shall be taken away from you. O how will you then delight in holy ordinances; how dear to you will be all the children of God; how will you despise earthly things in comparison of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord! how will you be prepared for temptation! how ready to endure, as "seeing him who is invisible!" how will your hearts join with your lips in declaring, "the life which we live in the flesh, we live in the faith of the Son of God!"

¹ Ps. lxxiii. 24.

Look not to yourselves alone, fellow Christians, for this turning of your heart to God. "The Lord is that spirit," says St. Paul, "and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty ;" there is moral and spiritual freedom, freedom from those affections and habits, which chain earthly minds to earthly things. It was the power of God, which on the awful day of the crucifixion rent the vail of the Jewish temple from top to bottom. It is the same almighty power, which will rend, and in the same entire manner, the vail which now covers the heart of the unbelieving Jew. It is the same almighty power which must work the same change on the professing Christian, turning him from a mere unsubstantial, cold, lifeless shadow of Christianity to true, vital, scriptural godliness. Such an almighty power, thus making us warm and zealous followers of the Lamb of God, instead of lukewarm, heartless pretenders to faith, comes not on us unsought, nor continues with us, if unimproved. You are to pray for it ; you are to improve every measure of it imparted to you ; not

suffering the still small voice, now, even now, perhaps whispering to you tidings of salvation, to be silenced by the vanities of an evil world; not suffering the seed which may now be sowing in your hearts to be checked, ere it springs and grows, by the cares and riches and pleasures of this life. The Jews, unfortunately for them, never looked beyond a carnal commandment. They saw not the Spirit of Christ behind the vail of types and ordinances. They are like branches broken off from the olive tree of God's Church (such is St. Paul's illustration). "Thou art now grafted in." Take heed lest thou be also cut off, not as a Church, but as an individual member of it, like a branch dead and withered. Without the power of the Spirit, sacraments lose their character as means of grace; the water of baptism is not the water of regeneration, and the bread and wine at the Lord's table remain mere bread and wine to the unworthy receiver. They bring neither spiritual comfort nor spiritual graces. Nay more, the unworthy receiver of the Holy Communion is in no wise a *parta-*

ker of Christ; but rather to his *condemnation* does he *eat and drink the sign or Sacrament of so great a thing*¹. To this holy ordinance approach now, ye communicants, with the vail taken off from your hearts. Look beyond the outward sign to the inward grace. Let your faith be so strong as to show behind the vail Christ as your alone hope of glory. Carry no malice, envying, nor bitter strife to the table of holy love and communion; and may such spirituality of heart and mind be infused into you from the spirit of holiness, that you may eat the body and drink the blood of your Redeemer to your comfort and grace and sanctification here; and hereafter be admitted to the marriage supper of the Lamb, where "the pure in heart behold their God," and the countless multitude of blessed spirits "sing glory and honour to him who has redeemed them to God by his blood."

To him "the Alpha and Omega" of God's creation, "the first and the last,"

¹ Art. xxix.

“ who liveth and was dead, and behold He liveth for evermore,” making intercession for his believing people. To him, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, three persons in mystic Trinity united, be ascribed, &c.

SERMON XIV.

ON ASKING IN THE NAME OF CHRIST.

ST. JOHN xvi. 23, 24.

“In that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name : ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.”

IN considering the interesting discourses of our Lord to his Apostles, as they are recorded by St. John, the first inquiry which arises in the mind of the pious reader, is, how far they may be applicable to the state and condition of all other Christians.

conceive that it only requires a serious attention, under the teaching of God's Spirit, which is promised to every Christian for guidance and illumination, to discover

wherein any particular expression or injunction applied to the Apostles only. And the same carefulness on our part, blessed by the same holy influence, will assuredly enable us to discern the mind of the Spirit in the inditing of it, how far he intended it for continued instruction, and how far we can apply it to our own consolation, improvement, or warning.

Our Lord had just declared to his Apostles his gracious design of sending to them, immediately after his departure from them, a Divine person, whom he calls "the Comforter, or Advocate, the Spirit of truth, the Holy Ghost." He had spoken of this person in a way which, to every plain reader of the Scriptures, marks him out as possessing the perfections of the Godhead. The Holy Ghost was to "abide with them for ever, and to dwell in them; to bring all things to their remembrance, and to teach them all things." He was "another Comforter," and therefore, corresponding in office and divinity to the Only-begotten Son. Our Lord evidently speaks of him as a person. He does not say, *It*,

meaning only God's grace. He says, *He*. "He shall lead you into all truth." And it must be a strange perversion of language, and a woeful deviation from all just interpretation, to suppose, that such terms could relate to a mere attribute. Having thus revealed the doctrine, that there is in the unity of the Godhead, a person whose office it is to administer consolation to the heart, and to give illumination to the understanding; having given to him the name which he bears in the great system of redeeming love; the very name, which our Lord particularly mentions, when he directs that baptism should be administered, "*Go ye, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost*"¹;" having thus instructed his Apostles, as they were able to bear his discovery of divine things, He proceeds to another doctrine, of equal importance, and of no less practical influence. He informs them of the office, which he himself should bear in the salvation of sin-

¹ St. Matt. xxviii. 19.

ners, after he had by his death made a sufficient atonement for sin, and by his resurrection opened "the kingdom of heaven to all believers." For by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, as an Apostle expressly informs us, God, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away¹. The Atoner for sin, the meritorious worker out of our release in our bodies from the chambers of death, and in our souls from the torments of hell, is our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But his labours for us, and for our salvation, were not confined to his days in the flesh. It was expedient for him to go away, to perfect the Almighty Father's plan of mercy. It was expedient, (and which of us, my brethren, can doubt his own declarations, which of us can refuse an humbling acquiescence in facts, to a knowledge of which reason could never have aspired, and which only revelation

¹ 1 Pet. i. 3, 4.

can discover ?) it was expedient for him to assume in heaven the office of Intercessor between the Father and us. Henceforward, as he himself instructs us, every prayer offered with the hope of acceptance, must be offered through him. In the same manner, as through faith the penitent and true believer stands righteous before God only on account of the merits of Jesus Christ, so through faith the pious suppliant at the throne of the Father can hope to have his prayer heard, and his imperfect supplications accepted, only for the sake of Christ. Thus to the believer Christ is all in all—the hope of glory. The sacrifices under the Jewish law pointed to the death of Christ as the atonement for sin: the mercy-seat, erected by the command of God in the temple, and appointed as the place where the Deity was to commune with his creatures, pointed to the intercession of Christ as the only way, in which the soul of the believer can hold communion by prayer with his Maker.

In the words of the text our blessed Lord proceeds to acquaint his Apostles

with this wonderful disclosure of Divine love. "In that day," he says, the day when such abundant supplies of grace and illumination shall be poured into your souls, "ye shall ask me nothing." I shall have departed: the Holy Comforter will have supplied my place. Ye can put no question to me. I am not near to you in person, to solve your doubts and remove your difficulties. But although I am removed from you in the human nature, and must not therefore commune with you in words spoken by me as man, I begin the office of interceding for you in the immediate presence of the Father. The Spirit whom I shall send, will give you the willingness to pray, and help you under the infirmities which accompany all human supplication. Through me, however, you will be heard. In my name remember to ask. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.* It is evident, therefore, my brethren, that the

injunction and the promise are given to all Christians, and not to the Apostles only. From us, as well as from them after his ascension, the Lord Jesus is removed in person. "The heaven has received him until the times of the restitution of all things¹." But prayer is for ever the believer's privilege. Prayer for Christ's sake, and through him, is a scriptural duty; and only through Christ's intercession can the believer's joy be ever full.

Taking it, therefore, as an undoubted truth, that to us here assembled in the name of Christ, and in the presence of the eternal Godhead, the command and promise of our Lord in the text are given, I proceed to apply it to our own improvement and comfort.

First. It is the Christian's duty and privilege to pray to the Father.

Secondly. Prayer is accepted by the Father through Christ, and

Thirdly. Great is the joy of the Christian, who, with fulness of heart, believes in the

¹ Acts iii. 21.

constant agency and interceding mercy of his ever blessed Redeemer.

Give me your attention, I beseech you, while with the Divine blessing I direct it, as plainly and briefly as I can, to topics of such truly scriptural consolation.

1. Often have I been pained at the objections which the natural man makes to prayer. He judges of the Godhead by himself. Or if he ventures to lose himself in the immensity of the Divine perfections, and attempts to reconcile prayer with Omniscience, he trusts to his reason, which, on Divine things, is always lost in endless wanderings. If angels, or blessed spirits, could ever be mingled with a company of self-called philosophers disputing on the reasonableness of prayer, some advancing objections and others answering them, they would be filled with surprise at the aspirings of human reason, as well as shocked at what the Scripture calls the enmity of the carnal mind against God¹. Nay, I would not trust to a merely nominal Christian, to

¹ Rom. viii. 7.

one whose heart has not been subdued by the Spirit to the love of God through Christ Jesus, to answer the objections against prayer. I conceive for my part, that no one can think or speak rightly on the subject of prayer, but he who feels in his heart "the truth as it is in Jesus." I admit that the reasonableness of prayer may be defended on the grounds of natural understanding, and the duty of it proved to the satisfaction of the natural conscience. But are we not Christians? Have we not for our guidance the revealed will of God? I would not speak to you on the great truths of justification through faith, and of sanctification by the Holy Spirit, on principles of reason. They are doctrines of revelation only. Reason is not opposed to them, but reason would not have dared to aspire to the discovery of them. They are matters of faith alone, to be received with humility, as the humbling disclosures of God's enlightening word. I would point to your own knowledge of yourselves (if haply you have acquired that knowledge), and ask you whether you stand in need of pardon from

God. I would appeal to your experience, and ask whether any man has made, or can make himself holy, whether you do not feel a law of sin within you, which is ever at variance with your consciences, and prevents you from acting up to a full sense of duty. In this way your reason may be made a handmaid to religion. In the same way would I appeal to your knowledge of yourselves as weak, and mortal creatures dwelling in a world of trouble and uncertainty, and I would ask you whether your hearts, and all their feelings, do not of themselves dictate the necessity of resorting for protection and support to a superintending and all-controlling power. This, however, I would only do with the half Christian. He whose soul is filled with faith in Christ, and love for God, and hope of heaven, would be addressed on higher considerations. The true believer has learned to look on prayer, not simply as a duty, but as a high Christian privilege. He knows that by nature he is at enmity with God, that if he were to listen to the rebellious impulses of an unsanctified will, he might be tempted to

ask, with all the pride of contumacious reason, "What is the Almighty that I should serve him, or what profit should I have if I prayed unto him ¹?" The imaginations of our hearts must be humbled by God's Spirit, and the obstructions to the seeking after God removed by true Christian humility, before we can feel the great privilege of prayer. When the self-righteousness of Paul's heart before his conversion was beaten down by a special call from heaven, then and then only he knew what it was to pray. He then knew it to be a duty, and he felt it to be a privilege. And only the real Christian, brought by the Spirit to the saving knowledge of the cross, can appreciate the inestimable value of communion with God, and see its important use in the sanctification and joy of the believer.

The next subject for our consideration, however, will enable us to enter more fully into the nature of this Christian privilege. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye*

¹ Job xxi. 15.

shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name. Have you, my brethren, a true faith in Christ? Have you delighted to dwell on his wonderful love for your souls with such secret musings that your heart has burned within you, the fire of devotion has been kindled, and you have longed to pour out your souls to God in prayer through Him, for whose sake much has been forgiven you, and whom you have therefore loved much? In what light would the cavils of the profane objectors to prayer now appear to you? Would you then think them worthy of an answer? Resting the sole of your foot, on the one side, on God's promises in his own word, and, on the other, on your own experience of the delight of self-resignation, of self-dedication, and of communion with him, you would rather adopt the words of the Psalmist, which before perhaps you thought to be mere enthusiasm, and say, *My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God. When shall I come to appear before the pre-*

sence of God ¹ ? The acceptance by God of the Christian's prayer for the sake of Christ is the great doctrine of the New Testament, and when coupled with other passages in the same book, must place this important duty and privilege beyond contradiction. All is now consistent ; harmony instead of confusion prevails ; and the Christian needs no other motive to fervent and persevering prayer. He, in whose name the Christian asks, was once a man like himself ; made like unto his brethren in all things, sin only excepted ; " He was touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and was in all points tempted like as we are ²." This is the mediator through whom the word of God demands that our prayers should be offered. " In him my soul is well pleased," said the Father, in language accommodated to human conceptions. " Him the Father heareth always." I " know that thou hearest me always." These are his own words. O Christian, what further encouragement do you need to approach God in fervent

¹ Ps. xlii. 2.

² Heb. ii. 17. iv. 15.

prayer? What else dost thou require to stir thee up, in all things to let thy "requests be made known unto God." Art thou passing through the fire of affliction? He, who on earth was the man of sorrows, pleads for thee. Art thou passing through some heavy temptation? He, in whose name thou prayest, was tempted in his days of flesh upon earth. Art thou afraid lest some earthly sorrow, some bereavement should be too hard for thy faith? He for whose sake the Father will give thee what through faith thou askest in his name, He wept at the grave of Lazarus, and was troubled in spirit, when He beheld the Christian mourner in all the agony of grief. Art thou seeking for higher advancement in holiness, art thou mourning because thy sluggish soul is bowed down with earthly cares? He who is the Mediator between thee and the Father, the man Christ Jesus, perfect in holiness and undefiled by sin, He himself in his human nature prayed earnestly even while he felt an entire resignation to the Father's will. He himself said, *Now is my soul troubled; and what*

*shall I say ? Father, save me from this hour : but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name*¹. My brethren, I should far exceed the limits of a discourse, to dwell on more arguments for proving the duty, and the comfort, and the efficacy of prayer, for this reason, because Scripture builds it on the foundation of the Saviour's intercession. Be ye not *almost* but *altogether Christians* ; seek ye that constraining love of Christ, which is the connecting principle of every Christian duty ; let your faith be that devotedness of heart to the Saviour, which is meant in Scripture, by passing life "in the faith of the Son of God," "by his dwelling in your hearts by faith ;" be ye thus decidedly and entirely the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, and you will require no other incentives to abound in prayer to God through Him. And as sure as the promises of God are true, only seek for this enlightening of the eyes of your understanding through the Spirit of truth, and

¹ St. John xii. 27, 28.

for this heartfelt knowledge of the hope of your calling, and you will indeed be able to magnify in your own sanctified souls, the exceeding greatness of the power of God to youward, who thus believe in your hearts to your everlasting salvation ¹.

The last subject for our consideration is the joy felt by the praying believer, who asks in the Saviour's name. This joy cannot arise only from the success of our prayers in the way in which we often presume to dictate to our heavenly Father. The Apostle commands that in all things we should make our requests known unto God. But he does not promise that each request and every petition will be granted according to our views of things. No! He says: "In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, *let your requests be made known unto God: and the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus*²." That is, *Ask in your Saviour's name, "and ye shall receive, that your joy*

¹ Ephes. i. 19.

² Phil. iv. 6, 7.

may be full." Thrice did Paul pray for the removal of some supposed obstruction to the work of the ministry, and thrice was the prayer unavailing to the accomplishment of his pious wish. But it was answered in a higher way than by being granted ; it was answered by a promise of the Saviour, that His grace should be sufficient, and that the strength of the Master should be perfected in the weakness of the servant. The joy of the Apostles was completed by a full supply of spiritual gifts and graces. Worldly evils beset them ; they were "made as the offscouring of the world ;" they were treated as the refuse of men. But faith had its perfect work in their souls ; and though they were sorrowful, yet were they alway rejoicing. Their language to their converts was ; *Rejoice in the Lord alway, yea, we say unto you again, Rejoice.* A spirit not of this world possessed them ; a hope, such as this world could not take away, gave energy to exertion, cheerfulness to suffering, and joy to sorrow. And similar will be the feelings of the pious Christian, who asks of the

Father in the name of Christ the comforts and helps which come from God. His joy is full, because his faith is firm, and his love of God an inward and controlling power. His joy is full, because he knows that "all things work together for good to him," good, not as relates to this vain world only, but good, in all that respects an ever-enduring eternity. He may feel that his lot is cast in troublous times; he may pass as an individual Christian, he may see the Church of Christ passing, through the furnace of affliction; he may be afraid at the overflowings of ungodliness, and tremble in heart, lest the Lord should have "a controversy with his people," and wickedness should cause "the foundations of the earth to be out of course." But his joy is full, because the God, with whom he has unfailing communion through the Son, whom "the Father heareth always," has the hearts of all men at his disposal, and reigneth with a merciful and controlling providence, "be the earth never so unquiet." Convinced that his Saviour has "all power in heaven and in earth," and having the

witness in himself that his love of Christ is the constraining principle within him, he meekly and faithfully surrenders himself to the leadings of an all-powerful and all-gracious Providence. In the mean while, he abounds in prayer not for himself alone, not for family and friends only. His prayers spring from Christian love as their source, and are daily offered for all his fellow Christians; for the Church of the Redeemer, that it may be defended from all outward adversities, and cleansed from all inward corruptions, until the time shall come, when it shall be presented to God without spot and blemish, through the Spirit that sanctified it, and through the precious blood with which it has been redeemed out of a miserable and naughty world.

Brethren! With what spirit do you receive these things? Is it with the spirit of the world, or with that which actuates the faithful Christian? "Then said I," exclaims the Prophet, "Ah Lord God! they say of me, Doth he not speak parables¹?"

¹ Ezek. xx. 49.

And so will the spiritual truths of the Gospel seem to them, whose hearts are unsanctified, and whose spiritual discernment is destroyed by worldliness and sin. Such truths will be clothed to them, with the obscurity of a parable. Judge therefore of your proficiency in Divine things, by the reception which you give to discourses like these. Many of you, perhaps, have not hitherto asked of the Father with a due and saving knowledge of the power of your Saviour's intercession. Learn to ask now for that Holy Spirit through whom the doubts and coldnesses of an unbelieving heart will be removed: by whom you will be established in the faith, and led from faith to holiness: by whom, amidst the changes and chances of this vain world the faithful, the rejoicing believer, who loves the Lord Jesus with sincerity, will be "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation," for his sake "who loved us and gave himself for us," the same Jesus Christ our only Lord and Saviour.

SERMON XV.

ON THE PROMISE OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING.

2 PETER iii. 12.

“ Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the
day of God.”

THE passage, in which these words occur, contains an awful account of the state of the world at the day of the general judgment. St. Peter, gifted with that inspiration, which alone could reveal events so tremendously alarming, both in their nature and consequences, describes the state of the earth and heavens, as he calls them, when the divine dispensations shall have ended, and all mankind shall receive their final sentence. The subject was full of reflec-

tions bearing on the faith and practice of Christians,—and it held forth in St. Peter's estimation, as it must do in the estimation of every true Christian, the strongest incentives to personal holiness. Which of us can represent to ourselves, however inadequately and feebly, the earth and the heavens on fire, and not tremble at the prospect? Which of us can think of what will follow, of the eternal state of happiness or of misery, without some feeling of awe as to our own probable condition, when all that are in the grave shall come forth at the voice of the Son of man? Awful as the subject is, and deeply interested as we all are in it, how often, brethren, does it employ *your* thoughts? Are there many among us, who, in the midst of our ceaseless engagements, are accustomed to reflect seriously and carefully on an event involving our eternal destination? Does the person devoted to pleasurable pursuits pause in the midst of them to think of that day of God, in which his destination not for a few years, but for ever will be fixed? Does the person de-

voted to the pursuit of gain, place himself in awful prospect before the judgment-seat of Christ, and anticipate that sentence which will make the lovers of the world feel the value of the soul, as surpassing the world and the world's wealth? Are the careless, and the frivolous, ever serious enough to think of this most serious of all subjects? The sabbath, among other objects designed in its holy institution, was intended by its Divine Founder to connect this world with the next; to produce a pause and suspension in the concerns of the present, in order that the mind may dwell on those of the future. A communion-day is another strong call to the Christian to turn his thoughts from earth to heaven; and therefore the serious Christian always delights in every opportunity of preparing himself for holding communion with the Saviour, in an ordinance so eminently conducive to spirituality of mind. The season of Advent, which is now drawing to its close, is also designed to answer in its proportion the same important end. While it prepares us for

commemorating the coming of our Lord in the flesh, it reminds us of another coming, of a second Advent, when the Lord Jesus, who came to offer himself as a sacrifice for the sins of many, shall, even *to them who look for him, appear the second time without sin*, that is, without bearing the punishment of sin, "*unto salvation*"¹. The Collect used throughout this holy season, embodies in its beautiful and simple language, the prayer of a believer's heart. We are instructed therein to ask grace of God, that *we may so cast away the works of darkness, as that, when our Lord shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through the same Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*². Thus are the two Advents of our divine Master connected together in all our contemplations at this season; and at the same time that we are called on to prepare ourselves for an advent already past, we may also feel ourselves reminded of the necessity of pre-

¹ Heb. ix. 28.² Collect, 1st Sund. Advent.

paring ourselves for another advent, in which also we shall be all deeply and personally, and individually interested; his coming to judge the world.

It is my intention, my brethren, in the present discourse, to pursue the awful but edifying subject; and as a means of bringing it more forcibly before us, to take a general view of the other two divine promises already fulfilled, which you will find to be connected with the one yet to be performed, and still the object of our most solemn and awakening consideration.

The first promise already fulfilled, was that of the coming of a Saviour to destroy the works of the devil, and to restore man to that image of God, which had been forfeited by him. This promise was made as soon as man broke his covenant with his God, and introduced sin and misery into the world. The very sentence which denounced degradation on the serpent, woe on the woman, toil on the man, and death on both, contained the first intimation of a Redeemer. When God pronounced that an eternal enmity would exist between the

spirit who destroyed our happiness in this world, and the whole race whose happiness he destroyed, he promised that *the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head*. This promise soon led to an expectation, that in one way or other a descendant of the woman would undo the miserable effects of the great deceiver's temptation. As soon as Eve was delivered of her first-born son, she cried out, *I have gotten a man from the Lord*, or as the original words are thought by some to mean, *I have gotten a man, the Lord*. But whatever construction may be put on her words, the promise was entertained, and its speedy completion anticipated. As years rolled on, the promise was renewed, and to Abraham was still more distinctly revealed. As soon as the elder Church was formed, this promise became its cherished expectation ; and through all the series of events, whether prosperous or adverse, which took place in the Jewish history, this was the promise to which the eye of the faithful was invariably directed. The devout worshipper under the law of Moses, looked for

the consolation of Israel in the appearance of its promised deliverer. The whole Jewish people, however misled in their interpretation of prophecy by carnal hearts and secular views, still looked for redemption to their nation; and although they were led in many instances to confine it to a temporal deliverance, still a deliverer was expected by the nation at large. The prophets, gifted with clearer views, spake more distinctly of the coming in of *everlasting righteousness*. Isaiah, as every reader of his prophecies well knows, describes almost as an historian what he was inspired to foretel as a prophet, and Malachi, the last of the prophets, thus ushers in the rising of the Sun of righteousness. *The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts*¹. *Unto you that fear my name, shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings, and ye shall go forth out of your present inferior*

¹ Mal. iii. 1.

dispensation, *and grow up*, in spiritual strength, *as calves of the stall*¹.

Another promise, which in progress of time accompanied the first, and which the Father gave even under the law of Moses, was the general outpouring of his Spirit in the days of the Messiah. The memorable prophecy of Joel is well known. *And it shall come to pass afterward*, saith God, *that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh*². *In that day*, says God, by the prophet Zechariah, *I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplication*³. *I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed*⁴, says God by the prophet Isaiah. And by Ezekiel, “a new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh”⁵. And lastly, by Jeremiah, “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts”⁶. These predic-

¹ Mal. iv. 2.

² Jer. ii. 28.

³ Zech. xii. 10.

⁴ Isa. xliv. 3.

⁵ Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

⁶ Jer. xxxi. 33.

tions may have been obscure ; but they must have drawn the attention of the true Israel of God to the promise of illumination and holiness, as planted in the heart by an influence from heaven. At length the first promise was fulfilled ; and the Son of God was manifested in the flesh. His forerunner soon turned the attention of the assembled multitudes to the promised gift of the Spirit. *I indeed baptize you with water, unto repentance ; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I ; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire*¹. We must not suppose that the fire here mentioned, alluded to the fiery tongues on the day of Pentecost. It was emblematic of that powerful, penetrating, and enlightening efficacy with which the Spirit of God works on the soul of the believer. The promise thus made by John the Baptist was not addressed to the Apostles. They were not at that time known. It was spoken to the whole multitude, Pharisees and Publicans, harlots

¹ St. Matt. iii. 11.

and sinners. "John baptized with water, which was a sign of penitence, in reference to the remission of sins: but Christ baptizes with the Holy Ghost, for the destruction of sin, the illumination of the mind, and the consolation of the heart ¹." Our blessed Lord, in the course of his ministry, and more particularly towards its close, revealed this promise in clear terms; and by calling it, just before his ascension, *the promise of the Father*, he identified it with that contained in the prophets. He showed to all his true followers what must be the state of their inward nature as his disciples; a nature new born and new created by his Spirit, formed after a holier image than that inherited from the first Adam, even the image of God, lost and now through Christ recovered, created in righteousness and true holiness.

These promises which I have mentioned, have been, you know, accomplished. The day of the Son of man, his manifestation in

¹ Adam Clarke.

the flesh, has come : the day of the Lord in the outpouring of the Spirit, has also been revealed. Another promise still remains to be performed ; a promise made immediately on our Lord's ascension. *This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven*¹. This is *the day of the Lord*, which St. Peter speaks of, which *will come as a thief in the night* ; this is the day, the promised day, when *the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up*². This is that day of God, which is peculiarly called *his* day. When the day of the Son of man was revealed, many rejected, crucified, and slew him. When the day of the Spirit dawned on the world, (and we are living in that day of spiritual brightness and holiness, the Church of Christ looking year by year for greater outpourings of this Spirit, according to her necessities, and always in

¹ Acts i. 11.² 2 Peter iii. 10.

her desolations,) when the day of the Spirit dawned on the world, many resisted his holy influences, many contradicted and blasphemed, many rejected through unbelief their redeeming Lord. And to the present moment professed Christians go on in the same rebellious opposition, and grieve and resist, and fatally quench him. But the day of God will be His day indeed: He will be Lord omnipotent and triumphant on that day: He will speak, and His voice must be obeyed. No resistance to that call, which summons the dead to judgment; no crucifying afresh the Lord of glory; no hard speeches, nor contradiction of sinners against the glorified Jesus. *Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him*¹. This day of God will be His indeed; then will the Lord show to an assembled world who are His, and who have borne His name in their hearts, as well as His cross in their foreheads; then

¹ Rev. i. 7.

shall the innermost thoughts be revealed, and the hidden works of darkness be uncovered, *and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.*

This promise of the second coming of our Lord, now forms the grand, and consoling, and encouraging expectation of his Church on earth. This is now the day to which the pious believer looks in faith and hope, though not without awe, through all his own personal changes and chances, and through the endless vicissitudes and revolutions, the perturbations and confusions of a restless, changing, and unsettled world. The Jewish Church, temporary in its nature and bounded in its extent, looked to the first coming—the Christian Church, Christ's Holy Catholic Church, militant here on earth, but soon to be triumphant in heaven, perpetual in its existence and boundless in its dominion, looks forward to the second coming of its Lord as the day of its redemption, the commencement of its eternal triumphs, the glorious day, when *the ransomed of the Lord shall return* from all their conflicts with sin and Satan, and shall come

to a heavenly Zion, with joy and gladness on their heads, and sorrow and mourning shall be no more.

My brethren, this promise is now before you for your devout acceptance and holy entertainment. A constant and unwearied course of life, directed by this powerful and guiding expectation, is one of the distinguishing marks of the children of God. They who look for, and haste unto, or ardently desire, the coming of the day of God, are Christians, who being justified by faith in Christ, have present peace with God ; and, being born again of the Spirit, are guiding their steps through a dangerous and naughty world, under his sanctifying influences. *Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ*¹ ; this is the character of the believer. *To serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven*², is the character given by an Apostle to them, who are truly converted by the

¹ Titus ii. 13.

² 1 Thess. i. 9, 10.

regenerating Spirit from the error of their ways, and are resolved, in dependence on Christ, and by virtue of their union with Christ, to walk as obedient children, no longer fashioning their lives according to their former ignorance, but as He which hath called them is holy, striving to be holy themselves in all manner of conversation. Is this character yours? To which of us does it belong? Can you look into your own hearts, and with prayer and holy confidence search and try them, and then say, as in God's presence, "Blessed be his holy name; I have through his Spirit been enabled to devote myself entirely to him, and, the Lord being my helper and sustainer, I can say with humble hope and aspiring faith, I count all things but loss, that I may know Jesus Christ, and the power of his resurrection?" Unto me Christ is precious, and through all the changes and chances of life, my conversation is in heaven, from whence I "look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fash-

ioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself¹."

O glorious hope! O stay and comfort to weak and sorrowing and disconsolate sojourners! O fixed and abiding prospect amidst the endless changes, and troubles, and agitations of this short and uncertain world! Christian brethren, heirs of this blessed hope, will you exchange it for the cheerless and ever-varying projects and schemes, which keep the children of this world in perpetual agitation, and elude their grasp at the very moment, when they are ready to count themselves happy and successful possessors of their objects? O ye children of sorrow, (for in every congregation there must be some to mourn and to lament,) would you cast away from you a promise so rich in consolation? Ye children of care, who from straitened circumstances, or disappointed worldly hopes, are passing your days in disquietude and anxiety, here is a promise on which you can rest with

¹ Phil. iii. 20, 21.

full assurance, that the unchangeable God is coming, under whose arms is present refuge, and under the shadow of His wings an abiding protection. Here is a crown worthy of your pursuit, ye ambitious among the children of men. Here is unchanging honour instead of that vain and foolish and ever-shifting reputation, which comes from the empty applauses of men. Look for, and haste to, the coming of the day of God, ye mourners in Zion ; ye who, whether in the morning or in the noontide, or in the evening of your days, have become truly and deeply sensible of your past sinfulness, unprofitableness, weakness, and corruption ; ye who have felt the fallacy of earthly expectation, the deceitfulness of earthly plans, the hollowness of human friendship. You have, perhaps, encouraged some worldly hope, which has now forsaken you ; you have formed some intimacy which now pierces you through with many sorrows ; you have felt the pangs of an alarmed conscience, and have fled with eager faith and strong convictions to that precious blood-shedding of the cross, which cleanses us

from all sin. *Stablish yourselves ; the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.*

*Look for, and haste to the coming of the day of God, all ye who love the Lord Jesus with sincerity, and are ever praying in all prayer and supplication through the Spirit, that he would strengthen you with the same blessed Spirit in the whole inner man, and make you blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world*¹. *Stablish your hearts, my brethren, I say again ; the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.* The coming of the day of God may be distant from his Church. Many and glorious events are destined to take place, before it dawns on this troubled world. But the day of death is to every individual Christian the coming of the day of God ; for then that Christian will assuredly know, whether he is the Lord's or not. For this day, which comes in an hour when ye know not, suddenly, unexpectedly, in the very moment, perhaps, when you are

¹ Phil. ii. 15.

looking forward to future years, for this day, prepare yourselves with all holy circumspection and earnest prayer. Let it not come on you unawares, and find you careless in the work of the Lord, neither converted, nor pardoned, nor justified. Let it find you consistent Christians, doing all the works of God, both of Christian faith and holy living, as unto the Lord and in his sight. *Blessed*, supremely blessed will that Christian be, *whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing.*

SERMON XVI¹.

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD.

ISAIAH v. 12.

“They regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands.”

A NEGLECT of God, and a disregard to his wonder-working providence, constitutes the character of man, under the influence of his natural corruption of heart. It formed the character of the Jewish Church, notwithstanding its outward privileges and its appointed means of religious improvement. It forms the character of nominal Christians, when their hearts “go after their idols,” and the love of God in Christ Jesus

¹ Preached on the eighth Sunday after Trinity.

has not been made by divine grace the ruling principle within them.

In the verses preceding the text, the prophet denounces a solemn woe, first on them whose ruling passion is the love of money. *Woe unto them, says he, that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place ; that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth !* These are the avaricious and rapacious, who are greedy after gain, and hoarders of it after it is acquired. The next woe is denounced on another class of sinners against the Lord. *Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink, that continue until night till wine inflame them, and the harp and the viol, the tabret and pipe, and wine are in their feasts.* These are the lovers of pleasure, the idolizers of amusement, the self-loving and self-pleasing part of mankind. The prophet assigns to sinners like these, an habitual inattention to the leadings and workings of a superintending Providence. *But they regard not, he says, the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands.* So that

we may observe, that covetousness and sensuality are the two great causes of man's neglect of God. They harden as well as blind the heart, and they make us inattentive to the workings of Providence: they produce a selfishness towards man, and a coldness towards God: they ripen us for destruction.

In opposition, now, to this character of the irreligious and unholy, drawn by the prophet under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, let us consider what are the feelings of true Christians in a matter of so much importance to their present comfort and future salvation. An ungodly Jew, who placed his whole religion in a round of exterior ceremonies; who *tithed his mint, his anise, and his cummin, and omitted the weightier matters of the law*¹; an hypocritical Jew, who made *clean the outside of the cup and of the platter*, while within he was *full of extortion and excess*², these ungodly hypocrites, *who loved the praise of men more than the praise of God*, might have seen,

¹ St. Matt. xxiii. 23. ² Ibid. xxiii. 25.

neither in their own circumstances, nor in those of the world around them, any proofs that the Lord counts our steps and orders all our ways. A Christian would not be a follower of his Lord: he would be a Christian only in name; he would neither have the mind of Christ, nor be led by the spirit of Christ, if he did not trace the hand of Providence, the hand of an Almighty and ever-present God, in all the events of life. He would not possess the animating assurance, which bears up the believer amidst all earthly changes and chances, namely, "that all things work together for good in the end to them who love God¹." Cold and dark and dreary must be our prospects, unless *with the heart we believe unto righteousness*; unless our faith be so strong, that in every situation, and under all circumstances, we can say, *The will of the Lord be done*. The true Christian, satisfied in his own mind, and grounding his trust and hope on a sure foundation, looks up to the Lord in every thing, and refers the issues

¹ Rom. viii. 28.

of all events to His disposal alone. He derives a heart-felt comfort from "regarding the work of the Lord, and considering the operation of his hands."

In pursuing the subject I shall endeavour, in the first place, to take a Christian view of the providence of our heavenly Father.

I enter not into any arguments whereby philosophers have usually attempted to prove the doctrine either of a general, or of a particular providence. Why should we rely on the frail prop of natural reason, when our faith rests on the sure foundation of God's never-failing word? Why walk through the wilderness of this life with the dim light of our own understanding, when we can pursue our onward course under the bright beams of Gospel revelation? Why suffer ourselves to be bewildered by philosophy and vain deceit, when we can read in the inspired Scriptures of truth the assurances of the Son of God, who spake what he knew, and testified what he had seen¹. Be it enough for us, Christian

¹ St. John iii. 11.

brethren, that our faith standeth not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. "It is written," says St. Paul, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world¹?" *Thus saith the Lord*: one such declaration, brethren, is of more avail with the true Christian than all the reasonings which have ever emanated from the school of the philosopher, or from the volumes of the disputatious follower of this world.

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, says our divine Master, *and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father: but the very hairs of your head are all numbered*². It becomes not us to reconcile the prescience of God with the acknowledged fact of man's free agency. "The Bible, and experience, and reason,

¹ 1 Cor. i. 19, 20.

² St. Matt. x. 29, 30.

all unite," says an able modern divine¹, "in giving testimony of the highest kind which the human mind can receive, that whatever may be the purposes of God, men are in fact free agents: and what is thus in fact conciliated or harmonized, cannot in its own nature be contradictory or absurd. All the difficulty lies in the *how* it should be so, not in the *fact*, that it is so. A God, Almighty and Omniscient, and a creature frail and entirely dependent and yet free, always and every where present the same paradox to the human understanding. The Jew, the Mahometan, and the Theist, are obliged to encounter it in common with the Christian of strict creed and principles." I take my stand therefore on the doctrine of Scripture embodied by our Church in all her formularies both of faith and of devotion; that God's "never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and in earth²;" that the minutest event, the fall of a sparrow for instance, is under his control, and comes

¹ Professor Stuart in his Commentary on the Romans.

² Collect for the eighth Sunday after Trinity.

to pass with his knowledge and permission ; and that our most trivial concerns, all that happens to us in small as well as great things, are under the direction of a wisdom that never errs, a goodness that never slumbers, a power that never sleeps. *Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things*¹ ; *of him*, as the sole governing cause ; *through him*, on account of his constant providential influence ; *to him*, whose glory is the final and ultimate tendency of all which is done on earth. If all things are not ordered by God, of what avail would be prayer ? and yet we are commanded *in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to make our requests known unto God*². If the will of God were not to be patiently and universally submitted to by the Christian, why should our Lord make this submission the subject of an especial petition ? When St. Paul was about to pay his last visit to Jerusalem, the last that is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, he was forewarned what was God's

¹ Rom. xi. 36.² Phil. iv. 6.

purpose concerning him. "Bonds and afflictions awaited him." His Christian spirit was manifested in his submission to the divine will. "I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus ¹." The pious acquiescence of his friends was manifested in the same way. *And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done ².* Paul's visit to Rome was among the fore-ordained purposes of God. *As thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome ³.* Paul, after this, acted entirely as a free agent. Events happened which were likely to defeat his purpose. The conspiracy laid against him, the long imprisonment at Cæsarea, the storm and the shipwreck, all seemingly ordinary and natural events, all proceeding from the natural workings of human passions, or from seemingly natural causes, all took place, and all to human eyes tending to defeat the divine

¹ Acts xxi. 13. ² Ibid. xxi. 14.

³ Ibid. xxiii. 11.

purpose. Yet that purpose stood ; and He whose providence ordereth all things both in heaven and in earth, brought Paul safely to Rome. O Christians ! look up to God in all things, make “your requests known unto him” through his only begotten Son whom “he heareth always,” repose yourselves on his providence with filial trust, “order your steps according to his word” as declared by your Saviour, govern yourselves according to his most holy will, and through all the varying events of life let your hearts respond to his unerring purposes. “The will of the Lord be done.”

But before I proceed to a practical application of the subject, let us consider some views of God’s providence, which the Gospel of his own dear Son enables us, through his Spirit, to entertain. First, it is a divine providence. It is God, my brethren, that orders all events. Remember, then, that he, who orders them, is infinite in power, wisdom, and goodness. One fact we Christians can lay hold of, and on this fact, amidst the slippery nature of every earthly situation or relation, we

can safely rest the sole of our feet. *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things*¹? We may be sure, therefore, that God is both able and willing to secure the present and eternal welfare of every believer, who unreservedly depends upon him.

2. The providence of God is universal. It ordereth all things. It reaches to all things. He clothes the grass of the field, and he clothes his faithful ones. He feeds the fowls of the air, and he provides for the support and maintenance of all "that put their trust in his mercy." Nothing is too great for Almighty power; nothing so trivial as to escape *his* knowledge, who knoweth all things.

3. It is a tender providence: the providence of a Father, against whom indeed we have rebelled, but who has himself offered to us reconciliation with him through the Son of his love. You that were enemies in your mind, now hath he

¹ Rom. viii. 32.

reconciled. "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ ¹." What can be a stronger proof of the tenderness of his providence, than the assurance given to us, that the party injured, the great and mighty God, whom we have offended, seeks reconciliation with us. The language of his inspired servants was, *We pray you, in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled to God.* All the events of the world for four thousand years, were ordered by God's overruling providence for the introduction of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And what is that Gospel, but a message of love and tenderness? The same overruling providence is engaged in the same work of bringing all nations to the obedience to the faith; making them that were afar off from their God, "nigh to him by the blood of Christ;" and giving to all alike "access by one Spirit unto the Father." If this be not a proof of a tender providence, actions are no specimens of character. *If ye being evil*, says our Lord,

¹ 2 Cor. v. 18.

*know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him*¹. The providence of God, therefore, is the care of a tender father ordering every thing for the good of his children.

4. It is also a watchful providence. Every description of our heavenly Father indicates an active, unwearied, and constantly superintending care. "I will never leave you nor forsake you," is one promise. *If God be for us, who can be against us?* This is another consoling declaration. *Neither height, nor depth, can separate us,* says St. Paul, *from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* His is the providence of a Being, who, to accommodate human language to his unceasing watchfulness, never slumbers nor sleeps. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him²," that is, entirely devoted to him. The history of

¹ Luke xi. 13.

² 2 Chron. xvi. 9.

the Bible saints is full of proofs of his unceasing watchfulness. The time would fail me to enumerate them. Joseph in the dungeon, Daniel in the den of lions, Peter in a prison strongly guarded and unceasingly watched, Paul in a stormy night and in a ship tossed by the tempest; these are a few specimens of the ever-watchful providence of our heavenly Father.

Brethren, these are comfortable Scriptures to all them who, being born of God and taught of God, are seeking the guidance of his Spirit, and submitting themselves to the leadings of his providence, "through all the changes and chances of this mortal life." The doctrine of an overruling providence, which I am endeavouring to establish, is quite consistent with your free-agency. It is quite consistent with your own active labours and persevering exertions. You know that the "never-failing providence of God ordereth all things both in heaven and in earth." The issues, therefore, of all your undertakings, and of all your plans and counsels, are known to him, are ordered by him, are

under his controul and direction. But you know not what these issues are. He, therefore, leaves you to plan, to undertake, to watch, to labour, to improve opportunities, and to order, as you feel that you do order, your own steps. Here, therefore, lies the great sphere of Christian duty and privilege ; here we are surrounded with all our responsibilities as Christians ; here there is need of Christian wisdom to plan ; of Christian circumspection to watch over our motives and actions ; of Christian care and labour to stimulate our industry, and to direct it according to the rule of the divine commandments. Never undertaking any thing except that on which we can ask a blessing from our heavenly Father, through Christ ; never undertaking it without asking that blessing ; pursuing it with a constant reference to his approbation, through Christ ; looking up throughout to him for guidance and direction, and submitting ourselves, as to the result, to his holy will and pleasure. Thus acting in all things as in the presence of Him who is invisible, we shall be among that blessed

number, who “ regard the work of the Lord, and consider the operations of his hands.”

What ! though disappointment awaits you, and plans Christianly laid fail of their purpose. Think not that your Lord forgets you in the immensity of his works. Does he design to do us good ? Does he aim, by weaning us from the world and its engagements, to win us to himself ? Then let it have that effect. “ Sanctified afflictions,” says an old writer, “ are good promotions,” that is, when they further us in sanctification. When they are not sanctified, when we come out of any severe trial without any change of heart, or without any subduing of our own will and carnal mind to the will and spiritual law of God, when this is the case, we have too much reason to dread the denunciation of God by his prophet. *Because I have purged thee and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee ; I the Lord have spoken it ; it shall come to pass, and I will do it. According to thy*

*ways, and according to thy doings, will I judge thee, saith the Lord God*¹.

Abundant matter of practical instruction yet remains. But my limits admonish me to be brief. Much I must leave to your own private reflections ; and with the Bible, my brethren, in your hands, as your constant guide, with prayer to God, through Christ, for his unceasing help, with habitual watchfulness over yourselves, so that all events may have a blessed influence on your growth in grace, you cannot fail, I trust, of gaining spiritual improvement from all the occurrences of your lives. Whatever you plan, whatever you undertake, and whatever you do, “go forth,” I beseech you, “in the strength of the Lord God, and make mention of his righteousness only.” Let every thing be begun with a view to your final acceptance in Christ Jesus ; and then you can rely on the assisting grace, and protecting providence of Almighty God. *Make mention of his righteousness only.* Plead for your-

¹ Ezek. xxiv. 13, 14.

selves in the name of the Saviour whom you love, the Intercessor in whom you trust, the Master whose law you resolve to obey. Endeavour to imbibe the spirit which dictated the beautiful prayer of our Liturgy, wherein we beseech Almighty God, "whose providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth, to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which be profitable for us;" remember the awful responsibility contained by implication in that prayer.

Thus, if you pray, that God would by his providence "put away from you all hurtful things," and "give you those things which be profitable for you," remember that the welfare of your souls is concerned in all the actions and undertakings of every day and hour. If you pray to be kept "from all things hurtful," oh let your own diligence be never wanting to keep your own-selves from that whereby your souls may be hurt. If you pray to obtain "those things which be profitable," remember, God by his Spirit helping you, to adopt all the means, whereby your souls can increase in

holiness, and holy wisdom, and be trained for the blessedness of heaven. You pray to be preserved from temptations which may be too strong for your Christian graces. Shun, oh carefully and unceasingly shun every way of life, every course of action, all company, and all scenes and occurrences whereby you may fall into temptation. You pray for every blessing from God both in the way of providence and of grace, whereby your immortal, precious souls may prosper. If sorrow be good for you, if disappointment tend to your soul's improvement, this will be profitable to you ; and if this ripen you for heaven, rejoice when you thus fall into the furnace of affliction. If prosperity and success be hurtful to you, if you be over exalted by this world's goods, and be tempted by the riches of his mercies to forget the merciful Giver of them, rejoice that the Lord refuses to hurt you by granting to you worldly blessings. You had better be among the afflicted Jobs, than revel in worldly prosperity among the Ahabs and Jezebels, and Pharaohs, and Ahaz's, and Herods, who sat on thrones and rioted in

worldly luxuries, until God's avenging hand fatally and finally consumed them.

Thus, brethren, may you "pass through things temporal" with such Christian faith, that finally you may "obtain the things eternal" through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

SERMON XVII.

ON THE PATIENCE OF GOD.

ROMANS ii. 4.

“Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long suffering ; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.”

IN every way in which we consider this declaration of the Apostle, it must appear most striking and important. Natural reason sometimes led men, thinking and serious men, to have some hope of the mercy, and goodness of God. But I do not remember any instance whatever, in which it led them to praise and magnify the patience of God. On the contrary, reason armed the Deity with terror. To appease the Divine wrath was the object of the

heathen in all his sacrificial rites and public outward ordinances. But man, unassisted by revelation, had no conception of God's patience with sinners ; how slow he is to execute judgment on them, how he waits on them, as if to see what effect his providences would have on them. For this discovery we are indebted to the Bible. Nor is this all that we gather from it on this subject. We learn another truth calculated to affect our hearts with more than ordinary seriousness. We learn that the design of God's patience is to lead us to repentance. The recovery of a sinner from his sins, and the restoration of the penitent to the Divine favour, is the end of that forbearance, which God through Christ is for ever manifesting both to communities and to individuals.

The subject, my brethren, which I have chosen for our consideration on this, the last Sunday in the year, is one which at every season calls for all our reflecting powers. But when circumstances clothe it with peculiar interest, we must indeed be almost infatuated, led away by evil hearts,

and by prevailing errors in judgment and in practice,—if we can listen to the word of exhortation or consolation with any feeling approaching to indifference. Rather let me hope, that you will weigh the matter most seriously in your minds, and let us humbly implore the aid of God's blessed Spirit to awaken us all to a due sense of the long-suffering, and forbearance of God, His patience towards us, in giving us this opportunity of hearing "the things which belong to our everlasting peace," before, through judicial blindness or some awful providence, "they are for ever hid from our eyes."

Despiseest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.

The Apostle here accumulates expressions bearing almost the same meaning, to give greater intensity to the idea which he would excite in our minds. *Goodness, forbearance, long suffering.* With what a majesty of awful benevolence does he thus clothe, "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Brethren, let your thoughts dwell

on the concentration of those attributes, in which we as sinners are so deeply interested. *Goodness* ; a part of the Divine mind which prompts him to desire the happiness, and to have no pleasure in the misery of his creatures. *Forbearance*. We love this quality in man. A man of a forbearing disposition attracts our love, and gains our confidence. A man, who meets with provocations, and forbears from treating the person offending as he deserves, is a man of real greatness of mind. *Long-suffering*. How merciful is God, suffering his creatures to transgress his laws, and reject his mercies in a Saviour, and suffering them to go on in this transgression and in this rejection, when he has the power to punish, and in justice could punish ; and yet suffering them long. The Apostle not satisfied with this accumulation of epithets, adds to the force of the description by the word *riches*. *The riches of God's goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering*. Of this expression our Apostle seems to be fond. In his Epistle to the Ephesians he speaks of "the riches of the glory of God's grace in Christ Jesus."

This is one instance out of many, in which he would magnify the wonderful grace and mercy vouchsafed to sinners in the incarnation, and death and sufferings of Christ, and in the renewal of the Divine image in the believer through the power of the Spirit. *The unsearchable riches of Christ*¹. "My God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus"². All these most emphatic declarations of the Apostle tend to show the overwhelming importance which he attached to the several discoveries made by Christ of the character of the Godhead. These are not speculative truths. They present not to our mind a theory, however beautiful and sublime, on which we rest without any ulterior view. They throw a practical importance on these discoveries of revelation. They form a part of those things which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man"³; they were revealed by the Spirit to the Apostles, not only to strengthen

¹ Eph. iii. 8. ² Phil. iv. 19. ³ 1 Cor. ii. 9.

them for their work, but also to furnish them with expressions suited to attract souls to Christ, in whom such treasures are hidden. All these expressions indicate the fulness that is in him; and in my text the same expression would denote that abundance of goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering, which God displays towards sinners, of which sinners are so apt to be unmindful, and which, if duly considered by them, would under God effectually stir them up to repentance. *I have loved thee with an everlasting love*, says God by the prophet, *therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee*¹. *Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord*².

In furtherance of my object in this discourse, let us turn to our Bible, and trace in it a few specimens of the goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, in one word,

¹ Jer. xxxi. 3.

² Ibid. xxxi. 20.

the patience of God. May the contemplation have its due effect on us !

1st. When God created the world and formed our first parents, he pronounced all things to be good. When He placed them in the garden of Eden on trial of their obedience, He displayed the riches of his goodness in the mercies bestowed on them. Disobedience to him was the melancholy result. Does our God show impatience at this seeming disappointment of all his designs ? Does He throw the work away, as impatient man would have done, and leave the sinner to perish in his sins, and all creation to be marred at the very outset ? No ! For nine hundred years was Adam permitted to live, a monument of the divine patience. And the redemption of sinful man and the restoration of him through Christ to God, and to heaven, became thenceforward the leading object of all the Divine dispensations. For four thousand years did God bear with this ruined world, when He sent his Son in the fulness of time to be the Saviour of it. And from that time to this has He borne our sinful race with patience, until the

time shall come for all his designs to be completed towards us.

2nd. Contemplate another most striking instance of the Divine forbearance. What a scene of depravity must the antediluvian world have presented! "The thoughts of men's hearts evil from their youth;" every imagination of their hearts tainted by the infection of sin, "only evil continually." Justice must be displayed on such reckless sinners. Still time for recollection, for reformation, for warning was given. *His days*, says our patient God, *shall be one hundred and twenty years*¹. For this long period of time did the long suffering of God wait upon sinners. At length the impenitent heart treasured up wrath, and the day of wrath was revealed in awful majesty.

Contemplate again the astonishing interview, if I may venture to call it so, between the Lord and the faithful Abraham. With what forbearance does God listen to the intercession of a man. *Oh let not the Lord*

¹ Genesis vi. 3.

*be angry, and I will speak yet but this once. Peradventure ten shall be found there. And I said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake*¹. The city thus to be destroyed was Sodom, the wickedness of which had been enormous: far beyond all common wickedness. Yet, a merciful God would have spared it, if only ten persons had escaped from the general corruption of manners.

3rd. The Canaanitish nations were sunk into the most deplorable licentiousness. No picture of ancient manners presents more disgusting features of irreligion and immorality than was the case with the inhabitants of a land, which showed in its fertility and in its populousness abundant proofs of the Divine mercy. Still there was a time, during which the Lord waited to be gracious,. Still the long-suffering and patience of God bore with these infamous contemners of every religious and moral obligation. "The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." Such was the reason assigned by God himself for his delaying the extermination of them. Ac-

¹ Genesis xviii. 32.

cordingly we find that God patiently waited with these wicked nations for four hundred years, until, no sign of penitence appearing, the sentence went out against them, and the Israelites were the instruments in the hand of God for executing it.

4th. The Israelites themselves are a memorable example of the long-suffering of God. From their establishment in the land of Canaan to the coming of Christ, an interval of more than fourteen hundred years elapsed. During this period their ingratitude towards God was remarkable; yet did he patiently wait with them. "I have sent unto you all my servants, the prophets, rising up early and sending them;—but ye have not inclined your ear nor hearkened unto me¹." Great were the revolutions of the world during all this period: and from their proximity to some of the Eastern kingdoms the Jews often suffered from the wars and agitations of those disastrous times. Yet never was the exterminating sentence inflicted, until by the crucifixion of our Lord they filled up the measure of their sins.

¹ Jer. xxxv. 15.

5th. The same patience was exhibited by our Lord in his treatment of the seven Churches of Asia : and years of forbearance rolled on, before he, who held "the seven stars in his right hand" and walked with the inspecting eye of omniscience among the seven Churches ¹, removed each of the seven golden candlesticks from their places. A difference of treatment was awarded to them according to their different degrees of faith and love ; but all have felt the punishment once delayed, and by their fall and ruin they speak to all modern Churches and congregations of Christians the same monitory lesson. *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten : be zealous therefore and repent* ².

The time would fail me to select from Scripture individual instances of the patience of God. Was not God patient when he bore with the crying sins of David ? This patience led the fallen monarch to penitence ; and ages to come, while they extol the Divine forbearance, must con-

¹ Rev. ii. 1.

² Ibid. iii. 19.

template with comfort the end which it answered. When Paul travelled to foreign cities with the murderous commission in his hand, short-sighted man would have arrested, if he had had the power, the bigotted persecutor, and laid him in the dust. Not so the God of all long-suffering. He patiently suffered the furiousness of the enemy, and by all-powerful grace changed him into the "chosen vessel, to bear his name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel ¹." Painful it is to think, that the Divine patience has not always been attended with the same effect. The forbearance of our God has hardened the heart of some inveterate sinners. After their "hardness and impenitent heart" they have treasured up unto themselves "wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God ²." Witness the reckless Ahab ; at one time humbled to the dust under the Divine denunciations ; a respite afforded him through his humiliation ; again rebellious, and at length, when

¹ Acts ix. 15.

² Rom. ii. 5.

the measure of his iniquity was full, receiving the righteous recompence of his misdeeds, according to the prediction which had gone out against him. All, however, on whom the Lord has waited to be gracious unto them, have not been disobedient to the call given to repent. We read not only in the Bible of such, whom the goodness of God hath led to repentance. The lives of many Christians, both in ancient and in modern times, are full of the most comfortable proofs of the patience of the Lord towards them, and of the glorious result in which the divine forbearance has ended. Many are the saints in glory, who must praise the Lord for sparing them when they deserved punishment, and for having brought them, most commonly through trying providences and fearful temptations, before the day of salvation ended, to a state of confirmed grace. May it be said of you, brethren, that the Lord has waited with you to be thus gracious; that all his long-suffering has not been thrown away, and that you are living mo-

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numents "to the glory of his grace." Not one, perhaps, that hears me, and has passed beyond childhood, who may not look back on the past and say, Had God taken me out of life at such or at such a time, I tremble to think where I might have been. I might have been with the damned, bewailing and for ever lamenting the consequences of my forgetfulness of God. Oh that the patience of God towards us all could, through his Spirit, so work on our innermost souls, as to cause an entire change in all our views and pursuits. Then we should witness indeed a revival of religion among us. None of us would be "doing the work of God deceitfully." None of us would rest contented with a mere heartless profession of Christianity. We should all be working out our salvation with fear and trembling. "O praise the Lord with me; and let us magnify his name together¹." Come, may each of us say to each other, come and I

¹ Psalm xxxiv. 3.

will tell thee what he has done for my soul.

There are two remarks which I feel anxious to lay before you.

1. The patience of God is a proof that "there is forgiveness with him." The one is the effect of the other. Do you think that the Lord waits with you, because he has not the power to strike? Do you think, that He loads you with mercies, and preserves you to enjoy them, and intends thereby your eternal ruin? No: "Account the long-suffering of the Lord," as St. Peter speaks, "salvation." He waits with you, that you may obtain salvation. He has no "pleasure in the death of him that dieth." And when he does cut off sinners in the midst of their sins, it is because he has called and they have refused, he has stretched forth his hand, and they have not regarded. They have thrown away opportunities; they have for years neglected warnings; they have followed their idols with reckless obstinacy; and, his goodness having not led them to repentance, he has in the majesty of justice

been constrained to say, "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone ¹."

2. This patience of God is designed to end in his glory. Either the sinner is subdued to God by such constantly recurring proofs of his goodness, and then his salvation redounds to God's glory, by manifesting the power of his grace. Or, the sinner is impenitent amidst the loudest calls to repentance, hardened amidst mercies that ought to soften his heart, and still continues in sin when every thing around and about him bids him sin no more; and then he displays in his eternal punishment the glory of God. The Lord had waited, but the sinner would not seek him. The Lord had poured down mercies on his head, and preserved him from all evil; and he has not been drawn to God even by loving-kindness. The two-fold end is answered. God has manifested his glory in his patience. Henceforward that glory is displayed in awful justice. The sinner will be obliged to confess that God might have

¹ Hos. iv. 17.

stricken long before, and would not; therefore his punishment is just. *Thou art righteous, O Lord, because thou hast judged thus.* And thus the punished sinner is compelled to give glory to God in the wrath which he has deserved.

But it is time, my brethren, to draw the subject to a close. On reviewing the events of the past year, you cannot but be sensible of the great goodness and forbearance of your God. I need not, I trust, recal these events to your recollection. Memory, however unfaithful to her office on occasions of ordinary interest, and after a lapse of years, must bring before your minds any circumstances of recent occurrence, whereby we have been powerfully and sensibly reminded of such attributes of the Deity, as those of patience and long-suffering. Instances of this sort, conveying undoubted proof of the operation of such attributes in his favour, must, I am sure, rise in solemn succession before the true Christian on retracing his steps during the year, which is drawing to its close.

But I shall not dwell on topics of a

general nature. I would in conclusion address myself to you as individual Christians. *Beloved, I wish above all things, says St. John, that thou mayest prosper, and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth*¹. *I have no greater joy, says the disciple whom Jesus loved, than to hear that my children walk in truth*, the truth of God, as Christ has made it known to us. You have, each of you, experienced this year the goodness and forbearance, and long-suffering of your God in one respect. He has kept your souls in life. He has preserved you from the destroyer. Oh! close this year, and begin the next, with being a people devoted to the Lord. Let his goodness lead you to repentance. Give up the besetting sin. Renounce the sinful habit. Let your growth in grace testify to your own consciences, and to all who see your pious examples, that the eyes of your understandings have been enlightened, that you know the hope of your calling, and feel in your hearts the exceeding greatness of the power of God's most Holy Spirit.

¹ 3 John 2, 3.

“Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen¹.”

¹ Jude 24, 25.

SERMON XVIII.

CHRIST BORN IN THE FULNESS OF TIME ; HIS
DIVINITY ; HIS INCARNATION.

GALATIANS iv. 4.

“ When the fulness of the time was come, God sent
forth his Son, made of a woman.”

THE course of argument, which the Apostle is pursuing in this chapter, leads him to mention the use and efficacy of the Mosaic law. He considers it as a temporary dispensation, suited to the infancy of the world ; a system of restriction and coercion required by a self-willed and ignorant people. He compares the Jew living under its influence, to a minor, who was placed under the controul of tutors and governors. In another passage he compares the same

law to a school-master. Under either comparison this truth is conveyed, that the Mosaic law was as temporary in its duration, as it was confined in its nature. Far different was the Christian dispensation. Superior in its nature, comprehensive in its extent, permanent in its duration, it was adapted to the maturity of the world. It was calculated to enlighten the most learned, to controul the most cultivated, to advance to comparative perfection the most polished states. Unlike the law of Moses, which was adapted to one people, and to one country, it was intended to diffuse its influences over the whole world; "a light unto the Gentiles, as well as the glory of the people of Israel." The illustrations employed by the Apostle are followed by the important truth contained in the text. "The heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors, until the time appointed of the father. Even so we," (that is, the Jews,) "when we were children, were

in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman."

These last words, which I have selected for the text, will afford matter enough for our present contemplations, on the return of this auspicious season. The nativity of our blessed Lord is calculated to excite the most thankful feelings: but the gratitude felt will be in proportion to the sense which we entertain of the blessings associated with the idea of a Saviour. The real Christian; he, whose inmost soul is filled with the consciousness of the misery and ruin which would have awaited unredeemed man, can alone appreciate the inestimable importance of this glorious event. He alone is prepared to adopt the prophet's bold and animated language, and in the fulness of his gratitude to cry out, *Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth in singing, ye mountains, O forest; and every tree therein: for the Lord hath*

*redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel*¹. *O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain : O Jerusalem that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength : lift it up : be not afraid : say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God*².

In the following discourse, I shall endeavour to direct your attention to three circumstances connected with the declaration which is contained in the text ; namely—

1. The fulness of the time when Christ came into the world.

2. His Divine nature, being the Son of God, whom God sent forth, and

Lastly. His incarnation—that amazing act of Divine mercy and condescension, by which He, who was in the form of God and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, was made in the likeness of men, and was found in fashion as a man³. These two last are doctrines of supreme importance, and in these times of strange and novel

¹ Isa. xliv. 23.

² Isa. xl. 9.

³ Phil. ii. 6, 7, 8.

opinions deserve to be inculcated on us with a solemnity equal to their value.

The first argument to prove that Christ came in the fulness of time, is derived from the simple fact that he did at this time come. The simple fact that God the Father so ordered it, leaves no room for cavil in the mind of every pious inquirer. Such an inquirer humbly acquiesces in all the providential arrangements of an all-wise and all-merciful God. He looks around on the world; he ponders with attention the page of history; he notices with an attentive eye the successive events within his experience. He sees just cause both from reason and from scripture to say: "Great and marvellous are thy works, "Lord God Almighty; just and true are "thy ways, thou king of saints. Known "unto God are all his works from the be- "ginning of the world¹." God knows best in what manner so to arrange them as to produce the greatest possible good in the universe which he made and governs, and

¹ Rev. xv. 3; Acts xv. 18.

among the creatures whom he has placed in a covenant of mercy. It is a judicious observation of Paley that "to inquire what the Deity might have done, could have done, or as we even sometimes presume to speak, ought to have done ; and to build any proposition upon such inquiries against evidence of facts is wholly unwarrantable ¹." We have every reason, however, from probability and from experience to conclude, that the time when our Lord came on earth was the fittest and most proper ; or in the words of the Apostle, "the fulness of time."

At the time of his appearance the prophecies respecting that appearance were all accomplished. Time was required to bring them to their completion. The events of the world were to be so ordered as to promote their fulfilment ; and at the very period when they were fulfilled, the Saviour was born. Thus for instance ; when the sceptre was departing from Judah ; Shiloh came ² ; when the national independ-

¹ Evidences, part iii. ch. 6.

² Gen. xlix. 10.

ence of the Jews was on the point of expiring, He, of whose kingdom there was to be no end, was ushered into the world. Thus again; during the existence of the fourth great monarchy, namely the Roman, that mighty and overwhelming power which had successfully conquered the preceding three monarchies, and was itself the sole and uncontrolled mistress of the world, the spiritual and universal King was born. "The God of heaven then set up a kingdom," according to the prophet Daniel, "which shall never be destroyed ¹;" "then the stone which smote the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth ²." Thus again; while the second temple was standing, before its signal and entire ruin by the Romans, the Desire of all nations came, and filled this latter house with glory ³: glory greater far than that of the former house. Thus again; when the seventy weeks were expiring upon the people of the Jews and upon the holy city, the

¹ Dan. ii. 44.

² Ibid. 35.

³ Hag. ii. 7.

Messiah the Prince was born, who was to make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness¹. No wonder that when John the Baptist appeared, "all men should muse in their hearts," of him "whether he were the Christ or not²." The expectations of the world had been excited: the long-looked for deliverer was expected by the Jews; the heathen nations looked for some mighty monarch; and the universal persuasion prevailed, that this was the time of his appearance. "In this fulness of time God sent forth his Son."

Another circumstance which proves it to have been the fulness of time was, that the Jewish dispensation had finished its work, and fulfilled the end of its appointment. It had preserved the knowledge of one true God among a chosen people and introduced it among others: it had kept up a sense of moral, social, and personal duties among men; it had prepared them by its sacrifices and burnt-offerings for a

¹ Dan. ix. 24.

² Luke iii. 15.

nobler sacrifice, and for a holier victim ; it had guarded the prophecies, and above all, it had shown to the right thinking and right believing Jew its own inefficacy in procuring the pardon of sin and saving the sinner from the dominion of his lusts. It had been the "school-master to bring men to Christ ;" but the heir, having now passed his minority, was released from its controul, and put in possession of the destined patrimony.

The heathen world also had tried all the powers of reason. Knowledge and education and civilization had been all at work to reform the world, and had all utterly and painfully failed. The cultivated and well educated Greek and Roman had found all the systems of philosophy incapable of discovering a perfect rule of life, of proving the future existence of the soul, or of confirming the hopes of man with respect to the mercy and placability of God, and of giving comfort to him, where light and comfort are most strongly required. The Almighty Father left all nations thus to themselves, that all nations seeing and feeling their

ignorance and their wants, without heavenly assistance, might seek for that assistance in the way which He should appoint ; might obtain the knowledge of salvation, and their hope of pardon from Him, who alone could impart both the one and the other, even their Father which is in heaven." "In this fulness of time God sent forth his Son."

To every reader of ancient history, the time of our Lord's appearance will seem to be the fittest and most proper for other reasons. The Romans had conquered the whole of the then known world ; an universal peace prevailed ; the agitations and horrors of war had ceased ; a system of complete civilization and of national improvement was carrying on through the empire. Every facility was afforded for communication with every part of it by the ample resources, which a despotic monarch could call to his aid from the wealth of individuals and the treasures of nations. How admirably was all this calculated for the spreading of the Christian faith ! With how much ease were its missionaries ena-

bled to travel over seas and lands with the Gospel of salvation, bearing its glad tidings to the remotest nations of the east, and of the west as far as the west was then known ! No wonder that the Apostle Paul, who himself had felt the advantage of such a state of things, and used it to the best of purposes, should exclaim, "so then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, have they not heard ? Yes, verily, their sound went into all the earth and their words unto the ends of the world ¹." "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things ²." The fulness of time prepared by the Almighty Controller and Governor of all human events had made a highway for communicating the knowledge of the Incarnate God, and facilitated the conveyance of the glad tidings of salvation.

The second truth contained in the text, is the Divine nature of our blessed Saviour. *God sent forth his Son.* I would ask any

¹ Rom. x. 17, 18.

² Ibid. 15 ; Is. lii. 7.

plain reader of Holy Scripture, any one who, guided by common sense and unbiassed by any favourite hypothesis, reads this passage, and similar ones in the Bible, I would ask him whether he does not see a marked difference between the language used concerning our Lord, and that concerning any human prophet. By the prophets God spake. Jesus Christ was the Son whom he sent forth. At sundry times and in divers manner God spake by the prophets. In these last days he hath spoken by his Son, and that Son is called the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person ¹. Can the Saviour then be a mere man? Are these descriptions the characters of humanity? Turn to the ancient prophecies, to that remarkable one in particular, which our Church has chosen for our contemplation on this auspicious day. *Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given : and the government shall be upon his shoulder ; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the*

¹ Heb. i. 1, 3.

*Prince of Peace*¹. Can it for one moment be supposed by any but those that have eyes and see not, and hearts that do not understand, can it for a moment be supposed that a prophet of God should thus be enabled to speak of a mere man! What! Call a mere man "the mighty God, the everlasting Father." The prophet Isaiah himself stands high on the lists of the inspired men of God. Still he was only a man of God. He, as well as the other prophets, is thus called by the Apostle St. Peter. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost²." The Incarnate Son, He "whose goings forth" are said by another prophet to have been from everlasting:" He only could be called "the mighty God, the everlasting Father." Great and deserved praise is due to the translators of the Bible. Their praise is in the Gospel throughout the Church of England, nay in all Churches, and among all persuasions of Christians. Their memorial has not perished with them. But two passages in

¹ Is. ix. 6.

² 2 Pet. i. 21.

particular, which are rather weakened by the common translation, show to every reader of the original, the Deity of the Son of God. Thus in St. Paul's Epistle to Titus, the translators of the Bible thus represent St. Paul as saying, "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ." Whereas according to the construction of the original Greek, the terms both of God and Saviour apply to one Person, namely Jesus Christ. "Looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our Great God and Saviour Jesus Christ¹." A similar passage is found in the second Epistle to the Thessalonians, "Our God and Lord Jesus Christ." But my limits forbid the entering into any critical details. They may also appear unsuited to discourses from the pulpit. When with these passages we connect those which speak of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the only begotten Son, the Person whom God hath sent forth,

¹ Τοῦ μεγάλου Θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Tit. ii. 13.

there can be only one conclusion, and that is, according to the second Article of our Church, that "the Son, which is the Word of God, is the very and eternal God."

3. The last truth deducible from the words of the text is, the Incarnation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The Apostle states in the text that he whom the Father sent forth, *was made of a woman*. Of this truth little doubt can remain on the mind of every reader of the Scriptures. The time was when heretics denied it, when it was falsely assumed that our Lord suffered in appearance only, that his human nature was not real, that like a phantom he appeared and conversed among men. That time has long since gone by. The facts of the Gospel history prove his incarnation; the arguments of the Apostle Paul assign some of the reasons why God the Father chose this manner to redeem and save a ruined world. The miraculous birth has been disputed, and is still withstood by the Socinian cavillers of the present day. But as long as it can be proved that the Gospels existed in their present form, from the earliest ages

of the Church ; as long as the first Chapter of St. Matthew, and the first and second of St. Luke are in the canon of Holy Scripture, so long will the Church believe the miraculous conception of our Saviour¹. So long will she regard with reverence this most ancient doctrine, that “the Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, took man’s nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance².” So long will she believe that “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us ;” so long will she receive “the mystery of godliness,” that “God” was “manifest in the flesh.” Let the unbelieving sceptic and scorner reconcile the two opposite and seemingly contradictory natures of the soul and body of man ; let him reconcile the consciousness, the active and intellectual powers of the one with the inertness, inactivity, and unintelligent properties of the other, before he dares to deny, that “as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man

¹ Bp. Horsley.

² Art. II.

is one Christ ¹." This is the confession of the Holy Catholic Church. We confess it in our creeds, we acknowledge it in our Articles, we recognize it in our simple and impressive Liturgy. *When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman.*

Permit me in conclusion, my brethren, to remind you of two brief important inferences deducible from the preceding survey.

1. Man is too often precipitate in his plans. He is too often impatient to see the result of his measures, however wisely and judiciously laid. Not so the God of infinite wisdom. For four thousand years a course of preparation was pursued for qualifying the world to receive the Gospel of Christ. For eighteen hundred years this blessed Gospel has been making its way in the world ; at times, it is true, slowly and gradually, but at all times, in an increasing proportion. Remember the materials it has to work upon ; corrupt and fallen man, from his heart naturally inclined to evil, and at enmity with a pure and holy com-

¹ Athanasian Creed.

mandment. Remember, how frequently the confused, and distracted, and agitated state of the world, torn by intestine commotions and foreign wars, has presented obstacles to its progress. Remember also its avowed opposition to the superstitions, and immoral practices of heathen countries. And do not forget that the treasure of the Gospel is committed to "earthen vessels;" that man is the instrument employed to disseminate it. Then you will not be surprised to find it not yet an universal religion; you will rather adore that Almighty power, which has been always with his Church, and which makes it prosper in the hands of his poor and unworthy servants. The world, however, is ripening fast for a wider diffusion. The seed springs and grows, man knows not how: but it will at length become a great tree, overshadowing the whole earth. The leaven is fermenting, and will continue to ferment, until the whole mass be leavened. *When the fulness of the time shall come, "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters*

cover the sea¹." "Violence shall no more be heard in the land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls salvation, and thy gates praise. Thy people shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified²." This language is not too strong to be applied to a community, of which every member is a true Christian.

2. The second inference to be derived from all that has been said is, what from analogy we are strictly authorized to draw, namely, that, in all the Divine dispensations towards his creature man, there is a fulness of time for carrying into effect the Divine intentions. That such a fulness of time is now approaching for a more complete diffusion of the Christian faith, seems exceedingly probable both from the prophecies on the subject, as well as from the general state of the world, and of specific countries of it in particular.

In the mean time be it our care, as indi-

¹ Hab. ii. 14.

² Is. lx. 18. 21.

vidual professors of this most holy faith, to show prominently and powerfully by our lives and examples, that the kingdom of God is increasing within us. When the heart is, through his Spirit, subdued to the love and obedience of his Gospel, the outward conduct will correspond to the inward feeling. "Make the tree good, and the fruit will be good." Nothing but the predominance of Christian motives within us, and an adherence throughout to Christian rules, can give to our daily walk and conversation the sanctity due to the Christian name. May our land thus, through the outpouring of God's Spirit, bring forth its spiritual increase! May God, even our own God, give us his blessing! And as for you, my brethren, in particular, the prayer of your humble Minister shall not, I trust, be wanting, that *the very God of peace may at length sanctify you wholly, and that your whole spirit, and soul, and body may be preserved blameless, unto the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

THE END.

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